PEDAGOGIES OF DOCTORAL SUPERVISION

IN

SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that apart from the assistance acknowledged in pages below, this thesis is my own work, submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg for the award of a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in education, University of Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree in any other university.

Signed:

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ACRONYMS

AAU	Association of American Universities
ASSA	Academy of Science of South Africa
BEd.	Bachelor of Education
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHE	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DST	Department of Science and Technology
HBU	Historically Black University
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HES	Higher Education Summit
HEQ	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HOD	Head of Department
JCE	Johannesburg College of Education
KOFE	Korea Trust Fund
LTPF	Learning and Teaching Performance Fund
MEd.	Master of Education
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NRF	National Research Foundation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University

SAC	Southern African Development Corporation
SANPAD	South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development
SLF	Supervisor Linked Funds
THE	The Times Higher Education
UCT	University of Cape Town
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UK	The United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
USA	The United States of America
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WSoE	Wits School of Education

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on doctoral supervisors, their students, and the pedagogies they adopt in a South African context. In reviewing the literature, the study paid attention to the meaning associated with the term supervision and how it varies with time. This was to unpack the models and approaches doctoral supervisors adopt as they supervise doctoral students. A brief look at global and institutional doctoral supervision does not privilege contextual issues about doctoral supervision. Using a qualitative approach anchored in post-modern epistemologies, the study explored how PhD supervisors and their students are positioned respectively to undertake and undergo doctoral supervision in the South African context.

Globally, doctoral supervision takes the German model where a supervisor in a discipline deals with a PhD student whose topic strictly falls within his/her discipline. In some cases, in English speaking countries, supervisors do take on topics that go beyond their own discipline. In South African studies, the focus has been on doctoral students and the role of supervisors in the cohort model of supervision (Govender & Dhunpath, 2011; Samuel & Vithal, 2011; ASSAF, 2010; Backhouse, 2009; Dietz, Dietz, Jansen, & Wadee, 2006).

This study argues that doctoral supervisors operate in a context that necessitates careful understanding and seeks to examine how doctoral students locate themselves within the South African academic context, which is racialised, gendered, and to a certain degree restrictive and authoritarian. While most supervisors engage in supervision using the apprenticeship model, understanding how they are socially and intellectually constituted as supervisors and how this experience interfaces with their students in the South African context, is critical. In trying to understand this, this study established that doctoral supervisors and their students' past learning experiences have bearing on how in practice they negotiate

the supervision process and practices. They both find themselves under immense pressure and confront overwhelming challenges as they engage in the supervision process. Under such circumstances, dynamic interplay between the individuals involved is essential for effective supervision, and more importantly the recognition and use of the varied assets, the role of active agency, the availability of enabling conditions and adequate mediation with innovative strategies, cannot be underestimated.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background to the study

Supervising doctoral students has become one of the most discussed topics in doctoral discourses in South Africa and the rest of the world today. The importance has traditionally stemmed from its role in introducing potential researchers to scholarly life (Donald, Saroyan & Denison, 1995). However, in the recent past, the critical role of supervision has attracted the attention of the state, employers, funding organisations, and other interested parties in South Africa. Two main reasons thus arise: one is the cumulative recognition of the place and role of research in national economic development and the ever-increasing perception in South Africa and elsewhere in the world that knowledge-based economies are critical for economic and social development, as well as the prosperity of a country (Herman, 2011; Warhurst, 2008; Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004). The second reason is the dominant discourse that locates "theories of knowledge economy as the causes of economic growth in novel ideas leading to scientific, technological, organizational, environmental, or health innovations" as opposed to natural resources, as has been the case for a long time (Nerad, 2009, p.2). Thus, given the important role of doctoral graduates, supervisors are expected to be efficient, produce quality graduates and work with both national and international research communities (Donald, Saroyan & Denison, 1995).

As debates on doctoral supervision (PhD supervision) and the place of the doctorate in modern economies intensify, concerns have been raised in South Africa about the rate at which doctoral graduates are being produced. For instance, the Department of Science and

Technology (DST) (2006) observed that "human resources for science and technology [were] not being adequately renewed" (p.15). Similarly, Malada and Netswera (2007) expressed concerns about the state of doctoral education in the country, with the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAF) acknowledging that the doctorates available are not adequately meeting the developmental needs of the country (ASSAF, 2010). At the same time, a paper presented at a conference in 2005 held in Cape Town, South Africa by the-then Minister of Education called for more researchers with PhDs (Pandor, 2005). In addition, statistics Backhouse (2009) show that only 16% of academic staff in universities held doctorate degrees. This implies a desperate shortage of qualified staff to supervise doctoral students. Although recent studies indicate an upward trajectory of the academic staff, issues of transformation still affect institutions of higher learning. Apart from this, Cloete and Mouton, (2014 p,17) "acknowledged that there was 'a shortage of academics'…. and that just over a third [of university lecturers] possessed a PhD, which qualified them to supervise a PhD." The Department of Education (DoE) (Now Department of Higher Education and Training - DHET) 2001, Section 2.1.3) claims that up to 20% of PhD students hardly complete their studies. It also points out that the "student drop-out rate of 20% implies that about 1.3 billion in government subsidies is spent each year on students who do not complete their study programme". Such concerns have resulted in heated triangular tensions, with students blaming the state, the state attributing the wastage to doctoral supervisors, while supervisors are of the view that students are individually responsible (Gardner, 2009; Lovitts, 2001). Clearly, each of the players involved in this triangle must be understood and examined in the context in which they operate.

1.2 Mitigating the challenges of supervision

The South African government is under immense pressure from multiple sources with regards to doctoral supervision. However, the state is quick to challenge doctoral education rather than problems associated with supervision. Thus, to effectively address the multiple pressures emanating from doctoral education, an in-depth analysis of these seemingly persistent problems is needed. The government, through state agencies and universities, has reacted to the shortage of doctoral graduates and other problems undermining the sector. For instance, in 2007, the National Research Foundation (NRF) initiated a project aimed at increasing the number of doctorates (PhDs) (De Lange, Pillay & Chikoko, 2011; NRF, 2007). At the same time, the DST and NRF believed that hopes for economic development were pinned on the production of more PhDs (NRF, 2007). To realise this aim, the NRF allocated 25% of its funds to PhD students, 60% to blacks and 40% to women undertaking doctoral studies. In support of these initiatives, the Higher Education Summit (HES) also reiterated the need for a well-formulated scheme to facilitate the production of more junior researchers in higher education (Kinnear, 2010), which demonstrated the government's commitment to socio-economic development through provision of higher-level education. With these efforts, the government hoped to increase the number of doctoral graduates from the current 1,200 per annum to 6,000 by the year 2018 (ASSAF, 2010) and "more than 100 doctoral graduates per million per year [by the year] 2030" (National Planning Commission, 2013, p.319). However, as the government creates an infrastructure to mitigate these challenges, it fails to consider the implications it has on supervisors.

Universities have experimented with newer, more effective models with regard to supervision in addressing some of these challenges. Such models include the cohort model, committee/team supervision, pairing of experienced and first-time supervisors, the course-

based model, or a combination of both. These models are meant to orient students, reorganise supervisors' roles, and facilitate "intellectual development and knowledge production in doctoral education research through a community learning" (De Lange, Pillay & Chikoko, 2010, p.3). This initiative is in addition to producing high quality PhD graduates who are well versed with the current challenges in and out of South Africa. Adoption of these models is vital because the purposes of PhDs today are threefold: training for academic careers, industry and for specific professions (ASSAF, 2010). However, those closely involved in supervision do not seem to welcome new/different approaches to supervision (Backhouse, 2009). With such revelations, critical questions arise such as: are supervisors effectively executing their roles? How are PhD supervisors preparing their candidates to meet the needs of the labour market and the demands of careers in academia? How does their orientation to doctoral education, supervision and knowledge affect the kind of graduates that they produce?

Universities have also implemented supervisor training programmes to assist in developing supervisory proficiency, address the limitations, offer coping strategies, and introduce contemporary trends in the practice of supervision in order to curb problems associated with doctoral supervision. This effort has largely been ignored with "internal training and seminars on postgraduate supervision" (De Lange, Pillay & Chikoko, 2010, p.2) being poorly attended by some supervisors (Backhouse, 2009). Consequently, students have stated that they receive low quality supervision - two hours per month – and as a result, take longer to graduate (ASSAF, 2010). However, it cannot be assumed that all supervisors intentionally absent themselves from these sessions. An investigation of supervisors and their practice is necessary to understand the reason why they respond the way they do.

1.3 Contemporary realities in higher education

As tensions and contradictions rise among and between government, students, and faculty over the inadequate number of doctorates produced annually, other local and global (pedagogical, social, and economic) issues seem to present new challenges. Consequently, the government is faced with a multiplicity of imperatives. The first is the dynamics inherent in pedagogical practices of doctoral supervision in a fast-changing social, economic, political, and global context. Pedagogical practices in this sense refer to all the processes, both theoretical, and practical, intellectual, and material, as well as creative methods that supervisors engage in in collaboration with their PhD students (Shulman, 1987) to facilitate learning. These practices may be influenced by issues of quality, accountability, completion rates and the nature of knowledge (Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011), which may determine the choices made by supervisors.

The second revolves around questions raised about the quality of doctoral graduates produced by the universities, their "nature and appropriateness of their qualifications, training and competitiveness" and misplacement of supervisors in terms of specialisation (Mutula, 2009, p. 7). For instance, the ASSAF (2010) reports that doctoral graduates have inadequate skills and knowledge in teaching, writing, presentation skills, quantitative and statistical skills. Similarly, the National Development Plan (2013) questions the production of knowledge that rarely translates into useful knowledge to a wide sector in the society. At the same time, South African employers have expressed concerns about the level of skills that today's graduates possess (D'Angelo, 2012) and the concentration in some areas in the programme which consequently determine what is studied and how it gets little or no attention (Manathunga, 2008). Then there is a growing trend about the changing aims of PhDs in the world today. Supervisors are confronted with the new dimensions of PhDs that draw a parallel from the

original objective of PhDs contributing to knowledge and producing professional PhDs that are tailored to serve labour markets and their needs (Manathunga, 2008).

The third relates to efforts to improve supervision which are compromised by increased enrolment at undergraduate level that translates into higher enrolment in graduate studies (Pearson, Evans & Macauley, 2008) without a reciprocal increase in the number of supervisors/lecturers. The resulting effect is that supervisors in South African universities are overwhelmed by the increasing numbers of students to supervise (Pearson, Evans & Macauley, 2008) in addition, to dealing with the diversity of doctoral students and their preparation for multiple careers (Maxwell & Smyth, 2011; Nerad, 2010; Manathunga, Lant & Mellick, 2006; Bloland, 2005). Furthermore, most supervisors are also involved in administrative tasks within the institutions they serve (ASSAF, 2010).

The Department of Education (currently, DHET) in South Africa has "stressed the need for higher education to increase access for blacks, women, disabled and mature students…equity access and fair chances of success for all…while… advancing redress for past inequalities" (DoE, 1997, p.1, 1:13, 1:14). It is however not clear how this fundamental policy directive is to be implemented at doctoral level amidst issues of quality. Of interest is the reaction of supervisors and how they respond to the nature of students admitted based on this policy. For instance, the director of a research unit in a South African university stated that the:

> race-based admissions policy is "silly" and "quite ridiculous", [noting that the] government should make it very clear to those students who don't get in, both white and black students, that the reason is affirmative action, but that the affirmative action is based on a very reasonable certainty that the students chosen will, in fact, succeed (Govender, 2010).

From this perspective, those in academia tend to favour admission on merit because students who can succeed should be admitted. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2008) acknowledges that poor-quality school leavers entering universities prompt institutions to formulate remedial and teaching programmes to compensate for the inconsistencies created by schools. The vice-chancellor of the same university elaborates on the tension between affirmative action and merit admission criteria which tends to be contingent on the context within which the student writes the exit examination.

> Using a race-based policy is second-best and is a proxy for the disadvantaged most of the time. Our experience shows that a black student coming from a township school who manages to get 65% or 70% in matric has overcome incredible odds. We know that if they had been in a good school, they would have got 90% therefore we do not want to penalize them because of the accident of the circumstances they were born into (ibid).

Doctoral supervision adds to these tensions and contradictions, as Soudien (2010) maintains that for academics, "it matters not much what the local everyday environment, dominated by short-sighted politicians seek. What really counts is how the world of *peers*, preferably those in the international domain, think of the institution and the individual within it" (p.231). The concern then, is how under such circumstances, the government and supervisors within higher education institutions will achieve both national and international objectives of supervision and the production of high-quality PhDs within the South African context.

Undoubtedly, contemporary issues such as supervisor relationships and issues related to the supervision process (Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011) seem to have an effect on doctoral students - These issues range from personal, local and global dynamics which shape the practices and processes in the faculty. With such challenges, one is bound to ask: how then do

doctoral supervisors cope with these conditions? What kind of knowledge and skills should they seek to impart? How can they effectively cater for affirmative action without compromising quality? In one way or another, these issues are constantly overlooked in the supervision triangle in South Africa.

The South African government in its effort to develop a knowledge economy has tried to provide the necessary resources essential for national development to increase skills and knowledge in the context of a knowledge society. However, there seem to be some uneasiness and opposition to these efforts, with policy makers and academics resisting the need to increase the number of PhDs in South Africa (Backhouse, 2009). Views from academics are further reinforced by difficulties and insufficient quantifiable evidence to justify the influence of PhD qualifications in economic/national development (Casey, 2009). Hence the tensions and contradicting reactions to issues in doctoral education by academics, on one hand and the government on the other, points to some discrepancies that can derail the efforts of either groups in a context that is yearning for new knowledge and solutions to ongoing social, economic, environmental and cultural problems. It seems that the main constraint of the government in addressing this issue is the lack of understanding of what supervisors do, how and why they do it, for whom they do it and most importantly, the context in which they operate.

1.4 Doctoral supervisors under pressure

It is evident that doctoral supervisors are confronted with numerous pressures by the government to increase doctoral graduates and deal with global contextual issues of quality, completion rates, gender, and accountability. Academics have contested some of these issues

indicating that little attention is paid to their experiences as doctoral supervisors and the context in which they operate. Supervision of graduate students is "seen as a problem or risk to be managed by the institution" and more poignantly, is "how to render supervisors more accountable for the effectiveness of their efforts, particularly in the twin terms of the "successful 'throughput'…. of 'satisfied' students" (Grant, 2005, p.2). Thus, it is this contentious engagement in pedagogies of doctoral supervision in the diverse context of South African universities that forms the focus of this study.

Given the multiple levels of tensions, contradictions and contests highlighted, I opted to digress and share my own experience in a supervision relationship and how it influenced my interests in the contested atmosphere of doctoral supervision and the way that universities are adopting to enhance effective doctoral supervision. I also juxtaposed my experiences with those of other PhD supervisors, administrative staff, and the government's efforts from two South African universities to achieve the aforementioned objective.

1.5 Biographical positioning of the study

Interest and commitment to a given pattern of life, thought and practice seems to be a function of a naturally calculated interaction and intersection between a person's inner self, curiosity, experience, and the environment within which one is located. My interest in the supervision of graduate students arose out of personal and real-life experience as a university lecturer. It was as a result of personal experience, firstly as a supervisor guiding undergraduates writing their research projects reports, and secondly, as a coordinator of educational research as course in the Department of Education, at a private university. A few things happened during this time that prompted a shift in my research interest from issues in high school curricula to those in higher education, specifically doctoral supervision.

A requirement for graduation from the Bachelor of Education (BEd.) programme at the Faculty of Education was the completion of an empirical research project. This meant that lecturers in the department were expected to supervise student research projects. Two years after the inception of the programme, issues surrounding project completion (similar to the South African government concerns of PhD completion) and the completed projects housed in the library, surfaced. What struck me most, were the comments made by fourth year students (finalists) about the projects they had read in the library. The comments identified inadequate disciplinary knowledge, poor command of the English language, and serious deficiencies in research design, methodology, as well as seemingly poor supervisory relationships with students. It was out of these 'corridor conversations and whispers' that I started questioning the capability of students to evaluate their supervisors. I also wondered how supervisors were engaging with knowledge and supervision practices in this framework. It was through these thought-provoking questions of experience, knowledge, and evaluation of pedagogical practices that I became interested in the topic.

Two, as a coordinator of research projects in the Department of Education, I received numerous complaints from students, ranging from soured relationships with supervisors, the need to change supervisors, supervisors taking extended periods of time to attend to students' work, and changing of the approved research projects among others. These complaints did not spare me either; a student requested a change in supervisor, and it happened to be me! However, students were not the only ones who walked into my office in frustration to seek solace; supervisors as well complained about students' poor use of language, lack of commitment and so on – in the hope that I would allow them to drop their respective students. However, as the bridge widened between students and staff and between staff and the

department/management, it was necessary to pay critical attention to students, supervisors and the administration's interests, in a more judicious manner, without compromising the positions of either that were involved in the process. I had to ensure that each of the parties, including the management worked towards achieving harmony in the course. However, I experienced contestations of power between students, instructors, and administrators.

My response to these issues was two-fold: First, given the need to submit higher quality research projects to the library and to enhance the image of those who supervised, I organised and provided the infrastructure needed for both staff and students, including inviting seasoned supervisors to facilitate supervision workshops and seminars about the dos and don’ts of research supervision. Remarkably, the experiences that arose from participants revealed that numerous implicit and explicit forces played out and at times exploded as supervisors, coordinators, students, and the management intermingled. The academic and social relationships, staff and management, individual pride and knowledge development, and the tensions and contestations among the participants cultivated my interest in supervision pedagogical practices. My second reaction was more personal than intellectual. Listening to student and supervisor comments alike, supervisors projected an image of knowing everything vis-à-vis research. It was at this juncture, that I felt compelled to carry out a study utilising the same participants in my project, with the aim of providing a solution to the tensions/problems that surrounded that academic space. I subsequently wrote a paper inferring that project supervision was a twin process of learning for the involved parties. This paper was seen as my contribution to knowledge in higher education.

Even with the interventions such as workshops, seminars, and the paper I had researched on the topic, little changed, and issues of supervision intensified with new sets of

students raising subtler and complex issues about research and the art of supervision. I realised that to understand the dynamics of supervision, I needed additional knowledge and understanding - empirical in nature - of the people, the processes, and the context in which they operated. This encounter culminated in a researchable problem.

1.6 Aims and objectives of the study

The main aim of this study was to explore and understand how university lecturers supervise doctoral students in diverse contexts prevalent in doctoral education in South African universities. The focus was on supervisors who supervise doctoral students and the strategies and actions they use that enable them to support students through the doctoral process to successful completion. To achieve this aim, the following objectives were formulated:

i. To determine the prevalent supervision practices in doctoral education in South African universities.

ii. To identify and analyse the discourses and contextual imperatives that underpin these practices.

iii. To investigate ways in which doctoral supervision can be improved under the diverse learning conditions of South African universities.

1.7 Statement of the problem

Doctoral supervision is a central pedagogical engagement in doctoral education. The South African government has acknowledged the significance of higher education and its impact on the economy (Chaya, 2012; NRF, 2007) and has therefore intensified its goal in

improving doctoral programmes. However, there is a disconnect because much emphasis has been placed on the policies aimed at increasing the number of graduates, providing financial support, and emphasising the role of PhDs in driving the economy (NRF, 2009; 2007). Little attention has been given to supervisors and the context within which they work. In fact, the assumptions made by these policies seem to overlook the experiences, expectations, challenges, and views of supervisors as they engage in doctoral supervision. Amidst these assumptions, what seems to be lacking is a clear understanding of how supervisors are selected to perform their duties. By focusing on supervisors, the study seeks to explore and investigate doctoral supervisors and PhD students, how they are selected, the teaching and learning strategies they use, and how they cope with unpredictable contextual imperatives. To achieve this, I was guided by the question: ***How do university lecturers supervise doctoral students in diverse contexts prevalent in doctoral education at South African universities?*** This can further be elaborated by attending to the following topical questions.

(i) *What are the prevalent supervision practices in doctoral education in South African universities?* This question addresses issues of supervision and the prevalent pedagogical practices that supervisors adopt. To understand and explain these practices, the question, through a literature review helps isolate and describe some of the models and mediation practices supervisors adopt during supervision encounters.

(ii) *What discourses and contextual imperatives underpin these practices?* In this question, I focused on several aspects. First, I addressed the issue of supervisor knowledge and skills in two ways, i) the extent to which supervisors are prepared/trained and well-grounded in disciplinary knowledge and ii) the various ways in which supervisors have developed the necessary skills and knowledge needed not only to guide and direct students, but also to deal with other issues that occur during normal human interaction. I retrospectively reflected on supervisors' experiences as

doctoral students and how useful these experiences are to their current engagement. Secondly, I examined the environment in which supervisors operate and attempt to reveal contextual factors that underpin the process of supervision. At this point, issues within the department, among students and other members of staff, policy practices, knowledge, global issues, and a set of stakeholders in doctoral education were considered. In this regard, I also mapped out problems or challenges encountered by doctoral supervisors.

(iii) *How can* doctoral *research supervision be improved under the peculiar/diverse learning conditions of South African universities?* Given the active and critical nature of the supervision process, I strove to capture supervisor agency to devise ways of improving the process of supervision. Along with this, I also questioned doctoral students on their thoughts about improving doctoral supervision in South Africa. In the process, I sought students' opinions on how they think the supervision process should unfold and be improved.

I concluded that PhD supervisors operate in a fluid and fast transforming environment that calls for agency and extreme levels of creativity to not only compete fairly at university and national levels but also to meet the demands of the highly dynamic global environment in relation to the quality and quantity of doctoral students. I elaborate on this argument below under 'the main argument of the study'

1.8 Rationale for the study

Doctoral supervision is a crucial pedagogical engagement in higher education. Its critical role in social and economic development (Nerad, 2009; Powell & Snellman, 2004;

Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) has attracted criticism about the nature and quality of postgraduate supervision, low throughput and continued institutional audits and quality of postgraduates (Mouton, 2007). In addition, there is a growing sentiment about a need to develop multiple skills among doctoral candidates (Pearson & Brew, 2002) and to radically understand doctoral supervision in specific contexts. In fact, there is need for a scientific investigation to help explain how supervisors, whose demands are partly determined by their context, operate in an environment. Thus, there is need for a study that examines variations in the ways that doctoral supervisors engage in the supervision process and how it is determined by their levels of expertise, knowledge of research disciplines and areas, their comprehension of the role that PhDs play in society and nature of the students they supervise. Ultimately, the study will provide the premise for understanding inherent differences and similarities in the supervision of doctoral students in South African universities.

1.9 Significance of the study

The significance of this study is vested in the lack of clarity in understanding the pedagogies of doctoral supervision in the context of South African universities. Consequently, those interested in the skills, knowledge and training of doctoral graduates seem to challenge supervisors and the process of supervision because there tends to be a disconnect. It is this inadequacy in clarity and the demands expressed elsewhere in this study that the significance of this study can be outlined. Thus, since the study involves knowledge, people, institutions, and a specific context. Its significance also lies within a contribution to theory and policy as well as the public who would benefit from doctoral graduates and their influence in society, besides making a general contribution to knowledge in the field of doctoral supervision.

Beyond current policy and practical concerns, the significance of a doctoral thesis rests in the extent to which it either generates new knowledge, tests a theory, can be generalised, or extend an understanding of a phenomenon. This study is considered significant in several ways: First, since it was informed by concepts of habitus, capital and field, the theoretical contribution of this study articulated utilising these analytical tools to understand supervisors and how they cope with the process of supervision in the context of South African universities.

Secondly, much research has been conducted on doctoral supervision with a clear focus on what supervisors should do to improve their skills and their relationships with students. These studies tend to assume a form of universal guideline and procedure for doctoral supervision with little attention being paid to the specific contextual realities and the emerging strategies determined by these contexts. It is with reference to this important dimension that the value-added dimension of this study was considered, with the aim of filling this gap.

Thirdly, the study highlighted contributions that can inform policy makers in the department and faculty. The findings should be able to inform policy makers about tensions between local and global contexts and how they impact on doctoral supervision thus facilitating decision-making processes. The study should raise questions about what characterises ‘good’ supervisory practices in South Africa, an issue, according to Golde and Dore (2001) and Lovitts (2001), that has not been adequately researched. I argue that institutions need to align their programmes with the market demands. Since the study sought to establish ways in which doctoral supervisors are equipped for their tasks, policy makers may use the findings to provide refresher courses in specific supervisory approaches.

1.10 Limitations of the study

In general, a variety of factors impacted the study process and the findings. This study examined a very small fraction of administrative units at selected universities and a small number of PhD students and supervisors in their respective faculties of education. I focused on two universities: a university and a comprehensive university, and I excluded universities of technology. This scope of cases hardly reflects the general nature of universities, doctoral students, supervisors, and supervision practices in South African universities to allow for the generalisation of the results. This, to a large extent limits the study, but the study can be used as a benchmark for further studies.

The data I collected and relied on may be conflicting and at times confusing. For example, some participants who were supervisors found difficulty in recalling their experiences at doctoral level, yet the rest of the data was proved to be valuable. This research was restricted by time as time constraints did not allow the inclusion of the views of people who had graduated from these institutions to better understand the extent to which, through supervision, valuable skills and knowledge were inculcated.

1.11 The main argument of the study

Pedagogical practices at the doctoral level in the South African context are of particular importance to this study. In this case, the argument pursued in this study posits the following claims: first, the problems facing current supervision practices is that they fail to account for the contextual complexities and peculiarities concerning the environment in which it takes place, and the profiles of supervisors and doctoral candidates involved in supervision. Local and global issues related to transformation, social, cultural redress, governance

conditions, as well as dynamics in the nature and role of knowledge generate a complex environment that calls for a delicate balancing on the part of supervisors to achieve their objectives.

Second, given the different and somewhat conflicting models of doctoral supervision to which supervisors have to adhere to, some do not account for these complexities and peculiarities, and a lack of adequate re-contextualisation of these models of supervision. For instance, supervisors who studied abroad approach supervision in ways that closely relate to their own experiences as PhD students, yet the South African transforming context is quite different and calls for re-contextualisation of these 'alien' models to suit the local doctoral supervision environment.

Third, taking into consideration the profile of current doctoral candidates in the South African context, it becomes difficult to rely on traditional forms of supervision without resorting to the inclusion of mentoring and other forms of socialisation in academic practice. In other words, in South Africa, those models of supervision tend to be reduced to formal 'training', in addition to this dimension, supervisors have to address other personal/individual issues including student attitude, relationships, networking spaces, skills and so forth. In such environments, mentoring cannot be separated from supervision, diversification of experiences and preparation of doctoral students with multiple skills.

Generally, these set of claims suggests that doctoral supervision is not only a predictable and clear-cut universal process but rather a more complex process that is highly sensitive to the context within which it occurs. There is a need to consolidate information that

can lead not only to the understanding of what academic supervisors do, but also the contextual forces that direct and redirect their efforts as they engage with their students.

Given that the world of doctoral education is an arena for doctoral supervisors, students and knowledge, its significance is a function of rules and regulations that govern the process. The rules and regulations for this discourse are formulated and influenced by individual discipline and supervisors, institutions of higher learning (as in departments and faculties, in this case faculties/schools of education), governments through the Department of Education and other global institutions that influence the way doctoral students are supervised. Consequently, in presenting this thesis, I endeavoured to rely on narratives from students and supervisors as they engaged in the process of teaching, training and learning, and seeking their perspectives to understand how the whole encounter interfaces with the various players in the context within which the rules have been formulated. My role then was not to hinder the process, but to take a position that would help accurately to articulate what supervisors and students say about who they are, how they engage in the supervision process and how they interact consciously or unconsciously with their work context. However, given the confines of writing a thesis and what supervisors say, it is only acceptable that most stories told in academic circles at postgraduate level are told in the form of chapters or academic papers. This thesis is therefore organised as follows:

1.12 An outline of the thesis

Chapter Two: Dynamics in doctoral supervision: models, mediation strategies and supervisor development. This chapter presents a review of related literature. The literature review engages in debates that have characterised the practice and pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South Africa and globally. The study set out to answer the questions,

'what' ‘how’ and ‘why’ in doctoral supervision. In attempting to answer these questions, multiple sets of literature were reviewed. The first set paid attention to the contested meaning and conceptions of supervision in postgraduate supervision. These conceptions provided the basis for the recognition that the context within which doctoral supervision occurs is instrumental in assigning the process any meaning. The second set of reviewed literature focused on debates on the main competing models of doctoral supervision at both local and global levels, presenting their strengths and weaknesses. Discourse on how people become supervisors constitutes the third set of literature. The existing literature and dominant debates revealed that doctoral supervision is a tense and highly contested engagement, with doctoral supervisors and students being at the centre. Apparently, not much research has been done to understand the dynamics that inform this process in different contexts. The chapter argues that doctoral supervision is a complex process that is shaped by contestations, tensions, and contradictions that are embedded in supervisor background, training, experience, and the context within which it takes place. At the centre of contestation in this encounter is knowledge.

Chapter Three: Understanding the pedagogy of doctoral supervision: theoretical and conceptual foundations. The chapter provides the premise for understanding how and why supervisors and doctoral students are positioned to undertake their respective roles. I discuss the key concepts that guide the study. I draw from Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of cultural reproduction as the conceptual framework and the concept of agency by Archer (1998) to inform and guide pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities. The main aim is to explain explicitly how the concepts of habitus, capital, field, and agency are used in understanding how participants are selected to take on their roles. To achieve this, it answers the question: *What are the key concepts that can best be used to explain*

pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities? I argue that personal and contextual factors as expressed in the cultural capital theory are critical in understanding pedagogical practices in doctoral supervision in South African universities.

Chapter Four: Reflections on the mode of enquiry. The chapter describes in detail how I conducted the study by combining the methodological aspects provided in the literature to suit this study. The study is guided by the question: *What research approach, design, and methodology can best be used to answer the main question in this study and why?* I then describe and justify the research approach, design, and methodology that I adopted for this study. The description locates the study in an interpretive qualitative research approach, justifying the approach based on the nature of the question and the kind of knowledge that is likely to be generated by the study. Given that I seek to draw on doctoral supervisors and their students' voices to explore the pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African context, I proceed by explaining in detail why I settled on a qualitative research approach and its significance in postmodern epistemologies, prior to clarifying the rationale and choice of case study design for this study. To satisfy the essentials of the case study design, I also discuss the qualitative methods of data collection and analysis used, how and why they were used to meet the empirical needs of the study. I argue that although a good research plan is developed and justified, the reality in the field can disrupt what was initially planned.

Chapter Five: Doctoral supervision in South African universities: contextual realities. This chapter aims at providing the dynamics inherent in the environment within which doctoral supervision takes place and how these dynamics impact supervisor engagement in the process of doctoral supervision from the literature perspective. I answer two closely related questions: *What are the key contextual factors that influence doctoral*

supervision in South Africa? and *What are the implications in doctoral supervision?* Consequently, the argument pursued in this chapter suggests that an unlimited number of factors intercede and influence the way supervisors supervise doctoral students. I acknowledge that the enormity of contextual factors can influence doctoral supervision and focus on what I perceive to be the most explicit and overarching (predominant) factors in the South African context. Essentially, the chapter strives to bring to life the field of doctoral supervision, and as Grenfell (2008) puts it, from Bourdieu's perspective, the players (supervisors) in the actual field [of supervision] are influenced by a myriad of both internal and external factors that eventually determine how the 'game' of supervision is played. From these debates, I conclude that agency and a high sense of creativity are essential ingredients in the supervisor's arsenal in a fluid and fast changing environment.

Chapter Six: The making of a doctoral supervisor: personal experiences as a PhD student. The study delves into the lives of doctoral supervisors, focusing on their experiences as former doctoral students years back and how their trajectories in academic careers were conceived and executed. This study aims at providing an exposition on the experiences of current doctoral supervisors as PhD students and what shaped them into their present careers as doctoral supervisors. Ultimately, the chapter seeks to answer the question: *How do supervisors' experiences as doctoral students inform the way they supervise their students?* Drawing on relationships, interactions, and supervision practices that current supervisors had with their supervisors, the chapter argues that supervisor experiences at this level act as an excellent resource upon which to draw on as they execute their current supervisory functions.

Chapter Seven: Becoming a doctoral supervisor: exploring experiences of a neophyte supervisor. This chapter reflects on current supervisors' initial experiences as

doctoral supervisors. I reflect on the question: *How did supervisors experience their initial supervision assignments?* The current supervision practices remain almost imprinted in the minds of the supervisors, a fact that constrains the possibilities of change or adoption of new methodologies or pedagogies. Doctoral supervision tends to operate within a reproduction model. I argue that although preliminary experiences of supervisors are instrumental in forming/constituting them for their future tasks, these experiences partially prepare them to change and adopt other modes of supervision.

Chapter Eight: Student profiles and identities: centering pedagogy and mediating conflicts and contestations. The aim of this chapter is to provide an understanding of doctoral students, who they are, and why they opted to enrol for a doctoral degree as well as their experiences. I also focus on their experiences as Master's students, in a bid to understand their experiences with their supervisors at that level, as a strategy to understanding how they were positioned for PhD supervision and how this positioning sets the stage for agreements, contests and tensions in doctoral supervision. I identified patterns of relationships with the supervisors that were critical in comprehending the pedagogical experiences as doctoral students currently under supervision. The main question pursued in this chapter is: *How are doctoral candidates prepared for supervision experiences prior to admission into the doctoral programmes?* Consequently, it argues that centering supervision pedagogy on thorough understanding of the doctoral student profile, background and experiences facilitates the unlearning, learning, and re-learning that are essential in the pathway to becoming a doctor. These are difficult and painful experiences that naturally evoke tensions and contestations.

Chapter Nine: Competing models of supervision: a call for re-conceptualisation. This chapter focuses on the understanding of the models of supervision that supervisors

employ in supervising doctoral students. Drawing on doctoral students and supervisor voices, the chapter seeks to answer the question: *How and why do supervisors supervise the way they do?* From their voices, the chapter confirms the dominance of one-on-one model of supervision but makes the case to strengthen co-supervision model. It identifies supervisor attrition as a threat to student progress in the apprenticeship model and sees the immediate redemption in co-supervision. The chapter presents a surging shift in the new models of supervision, as a way of re-contextualising supervision by acknowledging the mentoring practices supervisors engage in as they acclimatise doctoral candidates into communities of practice. I therefore isolate practices, experiences and situations prepared and adopted by supervisors that make it possible to shift doctoral supervision mind-set and conceive it as a re-contextualised social process that encompasses other aspects of student lives in and out of campus (mentoring). The chapter argues that competing models of doctoral supervision in South African universities are a wakeup call for re-contextualisation of PhD supervision.

Chapter Ten: In between them: inside stories of PhD students and supervisors. Inducting students into members of a community of practice as a form of supervision and mentoring entails actions and reactions that can evoke varied feelings and emotions. This chapter aims at identifying and describing some of the most contested and contradicting issues during the supervision encounters and how they are shaped by the context of supervision. It addresses the question: *What is the nature of tension and contest between supervisors and doctoral students?* Considering this question, I identify different kinds of supervisor-student actions and reactions to different situations which can be potentially damaging to students and affect student progression. This is exemplified in this remark: '*sometimes I would use silent resistance…. silent resistance and sometimes I verbalized when I felt violated very disturbing and you know you lose your sense of being, you lose your self-concept……'* (SPh4). Thus, I

argue that contest and tensions that characterise supervision are inherent in both the personal, institutional context within which doctoral students and their supervisors operate. This chapter is used to reflect on the intersection between mentoring and supervision.

Chapter Eleven: How can doctoral supervision be improved in South African universities? This chapter aims at unmasking the various ways in which doctoral supervision can be improved. Attention is paid to the question: *How can doctoral research supervision be improved under the peculiar learning conditions of South African universities?* The chapter argues that although doctoral supervision is fraught with challenges and problems emanating from both personal, institutional, and contextual factors, doctoral student and supervisor views and experiences can be crucial in improving doctoral supervision. Although the chapter deals with some of the challenges raised in Chapter eight, it mainly focuses on the voices of doctoral students and supervisors to discern the most appropriate ways in which the process can be improved. The chapter suggests that enhancing the context, practice and supervisor capacity can result in improved supervision in South Africa. It also suggests that the silent debates that students and supervisors engage in about their painful experiences and frustrations can be tabled and addressed amicably. Similarly, the continued call by government and policy makers for supervisors to 'manufacture' more PhDs within a short timeframe can invite a conference within which the way forward can be discussed.

Chapter Twelve: Conclusions and study implications. This chapter concludes the study. It discusses the theoretical, methodological and policy implications of the study, and offers recommendations.

The next chapter focuses on the dynamics in doctoral supervision: models, mediation strategies and supervisor development.

CHAPTER TWO

Dynamics in doctoral supervision: models, mediation strategies and supervisor development

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the key issues raised in the literature about trends and practices in doctoral supervision. Given the broad nature of the issues to be addressed, the chapter is anchored on the issues of what, how and why in doctoral supervision. Besides answering the question: *What is supervision?* it goes ahead to try and address the pertinent question: *How do supervisors supervise PhDs in South Africa? Why do they supervise the way they do?* The chapter utilises a theoretical framework in highlighting the main argument. The central argument in this chapter is that doctoral supervision is a mysterious complex process that is shaped by contests, tensions and contradictions that seem to be embedded in the existing debates about how it is supported. This argument manifests itself into two consequential views that eventually intersect to help in problematising pedagogical practices as experienced by supervisors in South African universities. First, given the diverse meanings attributed to the concept of supervision, the argument pursued in the first part of the review is that different conceptions of supervision in previous studies heighten contestations in supervision encounters. In this review, I reflect on the contested concept of supervision and provide a new dimension to its meaning. I then problematise the concept of supervision to provide for the debates surrounding the models of doctoral supervision in relation to the context within which it takes place. Second, the chapter argues that tension in doctoral supervision is a function of diverse processes ranging from models of supervision and mediation strategies adopted by supervisors and how supervisors were trained/socialised to become supervisors in the context within which they operated. Overall, the chapter privileges the various ways in which

supervisors were trained to supervise doctoral students and raises questions about the discrepancies associated with supervisor preparedness to supervise doctorates. I additionally try to establish how different pedagogical practices respond to dynamics and needs of doctoral students in South African universities. By providing the value of each model of doctoral supervision deployed and its respective weaknesses, the review reveals possible ways of ensuring that doctoral supervisors engage in practices that are both useful to the students, supervisors, and stakeholders in doctoral education.

Literature on doctoral supervision in higher education has not succinctly addressed pedagogical practices as influenced by the context of supervision. The effect has been that doctoral supervision has been treated as a process that is best understood by outlining practices, expectations, relationships between supervisors and students in the framework of supervisor-student models, as well as levels of attrition (Lee, 2008; Grant, 2003; Lovitts, 2001). While these studies have been instrumental in providing the needed clarification of doctoral supervision, they have not adequately problematised the dynamics contained in the context of supervision and the, resources that supervisors draw on as they supervise doctoral students. Supervision practices and experiences are thus portrayed as being controlled by institutional structures, and academics, it is assumed, operate autonomously under the auspices of academic freedom and pursuit of knowledge (Hoecht, 2006). Even with these perceptions, supervision remains one of the pedagogical engagements not well understood (Grant, 2003).

The rest of this chapter is organised as follows. Section 2.2 conceptualises supervision in doctoral education, focusing on the concept of supervision. Section 2.3 deals with the approaches to doctoral supervision (pedagogical relationships) and Section 2.4 addresses the

diverse mediation strategies supervisors employ to teach doctoral students. At this point, I use Sections 2.5 and 2.6 to discuss supervision knowledge, skills, and supervisor development processes before narrowing down to the nature of doctoral supervision and some debates on this topic in Section 2.7.

2.2 Conceptualising supervision in doctoral education

Discourses on supervision of doctoral learning should clarify this concept by providing readers with the entire discourse of doctoral supervision, given that different people hold different opinions regarding this concept. In the contemporary context of the university, where PhD graduates are trained, different stakeholders with diverse values, interests, expectations and traditions regarding the kind and quality of doctoral graduates, are silently contributing to the tensions that continue to shape the meanings attributed to this concept. This is despite Barnett's (1999) assertion that universities carry a social and cultural identity. With diverse stakeholders and significant roles that doctoral graduates are expected to play, the concept of supervision should generate some tension and contradiction between and among those in academics and those with a vested interest in doctoral graduates. As a result, doctoral supervisors and other stakeholders perceive supervision to likely influence the process and the products of supervision. Therefore, I review some of the conceptions attributed to the term supervision and how the term has developed over time.

Laske and Zuber-Skerrit (1996) define supervision as a process of fostering and facilitating learning, research, and communication at the highest level. This conception reflects on communication of research findings as an essential component of supervision. Thus, the notion revolves around practices that underpin doctoral learning, therefore implying

that doctoral students are exposed to seminars, workshops, and conferences. Generally, doctoral supervisory practices deployed by supervisors are informed by the need to support students to develop research skills and knowledge. However, from the point of view of stakeholders outside of academia, with their orientation geared more towards the rest of the labour market, this definition could be problematic for those focusing more on the academic part of the process at the expense of supplementary skills and knowledge.

Ender, Winston, and Miller (1984) define supervision as an organised procedure between students and supervisors envisioned for students to achieve their academic, occupational, and personal goals. The authors point out students' personal, academic, and work-related goals as the key intents of supervision. Besides this, the inclusion of occupational intentions implies that supervisors are conscious of a variety of professions that exist and for which they are preparing their candidates. Nerad (2012) agrees with this view and argues for the need to train and produce "high quality researchers who are able to bring innovative changes to their workplaces, whether it is in business, government, academe or non-profit sectors" (p. 59). Although this conception seems quite comprehensive, it assumes that all supervisors will consciously impart (general) work-related skills. Such a goal can be difficult to achieve given the context within which supervisors operate.

Similarly, Pearson and Kayrooz (2004) define research supervision as a facilitative process that calls for assistance and a supportive process, but it is not free from challenges. These perceptions are typical of the variation in the approaches that supervisors take and their points of emphasis as they supervise students (Backhouse, 2009).

Conceptions of doctoral supervision presented here are closely related yet their scope and areas of emphasis vary to a certain degree. While these conceptions share the view that the central purpose of supervision is to guide and facilitate students' attainment of research competencies, tensions do exist as supervision ensues and the need to provide work-related skills. However, the general impression is that the conceptions are linked to institutional expectations of what supervisors should do and the disciplinary contexts in which supervisors find themselves. Such linkages are bound to exclude the interests of other parties that also benefit from this process. Thus, the intentions of supervision, as outlined in the diverse conceptions, seem to be a function of what the general academic community prescribes.

For purposes of this study, the meaning of supervision is not based only on its original intention of guiding and directing students to make contribution to knowledge at doctoral level, but also other issues that entail supervision but were not clearly captured by these definitions, yet they may have a significant bearing on supervision and the process. This study perceives supervision as any form of formal or informal guidance, exposure, [learning] and support - intellectual, social, emotional, financial, and material - that is directed towards the completion of a PhD to the satisfaction of both the university, the student, and all those who are positioned to utilise the knowledge and services of doctoral graduates within a specified acceptable timeframe and context.

While debates on the purpose of supervision have focused on what supervisors do in line with the nature and kind of support apportioned to the candidates (Barnes & Austin, 2009), I take it further to find out what the purpose of supervision is, for the intended beneficiaries of the doctoral graduates. In this case, the concept of supervision should take cognisance of the consumer of the graduates' skills and knowledge beyond the university,

given the current market-driven education. This view is taken, given the changing nature of knowledge and the view that doctoral education should not only pursue the research and teaching mission that leads to the formation of a community of scholars as prescribed by higher institutions, but also within the contemporary changing times and "produce graduates who enter other arenas of work where scholarly professionals are needed" (Austin, 2011, p.2). Thus, this conception makes the exercise more complicated in that currently, what counts at the end is the doctoral certificate and the thesis but does not necessarily satisfy all beneficiaries of the skills and knowledge gained.

Hence, in trying to satisfy the demands of supervision and the needs of the stakeholders, there have been debates about what supervisors do and how they do it. Individual researchers and university departments/faculties have outlined the roles of a supervisor. Barnes and Austin (2009) and Sambrook, Stewart and Roberts (2008) outline key functions of the supervisor as a departmental socialiser, a source of dependable information, a role model, and a professional socialiser. Other scholars have argued that supervisors should be able to identify students who are experiencing problems with progress, the reasons behind limited progress and the possible solutions to these pitfalls (Ahern & Manathunga, 2004). Besides this, most supervisors are involved in giving directions and instructions on the nature and structure of the thesis and provide assessment standards of a doctoral thesis (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Charlesworth *et al.* (2007) in a University of the Witwatersrand supervision guide, *Strategies for successful postgraduate supervision* acknowledge these roles but add that supervisors should be able to mentor and encourage students to publish research articles, present their research in staff, local and international conferences, and improve their writing skills. Similarly, agreements signed between students and supervisors at the University of Johannesburg outline what supervisors should do during the supervision engagement (Faculty

of Education, University of Johannesburg: Agreement between Masters/Doctoral students and Supervisor/Co-supervisor). Although these specifications seem ideal and represent perfect roles for supervisors, they do not reflect the reality in academia. Debates on the roles/functions of supervisors do not point at the context of operations of supervisors as an important adjunct to the process of supervision. As a result, the sociological process and nature of learning and acquiring skills, values, attitudes and the habits and modes of thoughts, as suggested by Bragg (1976), seem to be excluded. In addition, doctoral education has been associated with tensions and contradictions that characterise the process. Thus, for effective supervision to take place, the facilitative/guiding/instructor/role of the supervisor should embrace these two dimensions, and the activities should also be framed in ways that enables the generative power of tension and contestation to affirm itself. Tension and contestation do not only concern supervision but also the relationship of peers or peer support (Backhouse, Ungadi & Cross, 2015). If conversations with peers, is absent, then the learning only takes place with the supervisor. While tension and contestation have the potential to generate conflict, they do not necessarily imply or lead to conflict. How then do students and supervisors engage in this process? The next section explores debates on this question.

2.3 Approaches to doctoral supervision (pedagogical relationships)

The approaches that supervisors use include one-on-one, cohort, committee, or co-supervision models to engage and advise doctoral students. These approaches are commonly referred to as *models of supervision* (ASSAF, 2010; Jemeson & Naidoo, 2007; Dietz, Jansen & Wadee, 2006). They are characterised by the number of students a supervisor attends to, the levels of involvement of supervisors, the degree of involvement of experts from other fields and doctoral students, the number of students served by the model and the extent to which students are exposed to other related disciplines (ASSAF, 2012; Petre & Rugg, 2011). Here

the models are to be understood as "conceptual approaches to teaching and learning" at doctoral levels (Lee, 2010). The sections that follows discusses these models.

2.3.1 The one-on-one model

Available literature reveals that this approach was introduced by Humboldt University in Germany in the nineteenth century, an era that was suited for this kind of approach (Wolhuter, 2011) and is now archaic. The author notes that the realities of globalization and the one-on-one (apprenticeship) model produces graduates whose skills have been wanting alternative and more contemporary models needed to address the slowly but transforming knowledge economy of South Africa. Similarly, Kehm (2007) points out that students supervised conventionally may not complete or take long to complete their studies but are inadequate because they are not well informed about the market and the opportunities available, and lack professional, managerial, and organizational skills.

ASSAF (2010) and Dietz *et al.* (2006) acknowledge the one-on-one (apprenticeship) model as the earliest model of supervision where a single student is assigned a single supervisor. Differences in perceptions of what supervision entails and what supervisors do have generated arguments in favour for or against this model. Those in favour argue that supervisors are framed as people who are 'omnipresent' in so far as processes of supervision are concerned. The model rests on the assumption that a student learns the necessary skills and competencies exclusively from the supervisor (Jemeson & Naidoo, 2007). It offers PhD students an opportunity to be supervised and mentored by a highly qualified, experienced person, who in most cases, provides the student with some form of sponsorship (Halse & Bansel, 2012). This enhances the production of highly specialised graduates (Jemeson & Naidoo, 2007) that conform to a community of practice (Lee, 2010).

However, this model has been criticised for "serving a small number of PhD students and therefore working against the government policy of increasing the number of PhD graduates" (ASSAF, 2010). Leder (1995) is of the view that supervisor feelings, views, preferences and prejudices, and perceptions can have a negative impact on the scope, methodology and direction of the entire research project. This model also fails to accommodate knowledge or perspectives from other fields because research is no longer the customary type where one supervisor concentrated on a single student in the campus (Holbrook & Johnson, 2006).

This view is critical given the changing nature of doctoral supervision and the field of doctoral education in general because the one-on-one approach sounds narrow and limiting to both students and supervisors involved. In addition, the possibilities of limited innovation in this model have been questioned (Halse & Bansel, 2012) as academics' fear the reproduction of outdated knowledge and practices which could be ingrained in supervisor's work (Enders, 2005). There are also claims that this approach contributes to late completion and increased dropout rates (Lewis *et al.,* 2010). Despite all these factors, a study by Backhouse (2009) found the one-on-one model to be the most common approach in South African universities.

Although the model has been under sharp criticism from higher education scholars, available literature has not provided any evidence demonstrating that an individual supervisor cannot facilitate learning that is responsive to the contemporary demands of the knowledge economy and explicitly, the needs of the labour market and the specific discipline. Even as the approach is being vilified, there is limited research to show how prior experience has supported supervisors in their current supervisory engagements in the South African context.

While Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) observe that the one-on-one model was "inherited from the Oxbridge tradition" (p. 3), my point of concern is: Why has the model remained common in South African higher education institutions (HEI)? What is also puzzling is that for many decades, research findings have maintained the formal nature of the one-on-one approach to supervision with no regard for student interaction and experience with peers without the presence of their supervisors. Given these limitations, the cohort model has been introduced to attempt to address these limitations.

2.3.2 The cohort model

In South Africa, the *cohort model* of supervision has been in use since the 1990s, having originated from the former Historically Black University (HBU), in KwaZulu-Natal (De Lange, Pillay & Chikoko, 2011; Samuel & Vithal, 2011). ASSAF (2010) defines the cohort model as "a PhD year-group of self-minded doctoral candidates who study together in workshops, progress through to doctoral studies, are identified by others as a group and identify themselves as a group" (p.66). This model is characterised by seminar sessions, support from peers, junior, experienced supervisors, and fellow PhD students (Govender & Dhunpath, 2010). Essentially, seminar presentations found in this context provide thought-provoking appraisals from the participants of student work in progress. This model is meant to address the shortcomings of the one-on-one model (ASSAF 2010).

As for cohort model supervision, various arguments have been made in its favour. Burnett (1999) points out that it is highly efficient in time and resource management, facilitates the development of a community of scholars, reduces isolation and increases completion rates. Furthermore, it promotes immense solidarity and dependability within the

cohort, ensuring support from supervisors and academic staff besides providing structure and clear achievement of targets (ASSAF, 2010).

However, other researchers have been critical about this approach, with studies claiming that not all members of staff participate in the core sessions where the cohort model is realised (De Lange, Pillay & Chikoko, 2011). In some cases, according to ASSAF (2010), there is also inadequate commitment from students and supervisors, intensifying feelings of pressure from students dictated by completion deadlines and the feeling of isolation from external groups. Furthermore, misconceptions among the participants and immense pressure on the supervisors pose another weakness of the model (Govender & Dhunpath, 2010). The authors acknowledge that "without purposeful faculty nurturance, departmental collaboration and administrative guidance, the cohort model becomes a convenience tool" (p.4) in supervision engagements. Another major weakness in the model is that some students may fail to attend the meetings because of the different kinds of support that are offered at different levels of the student's journey. However, like all journeys, the trajectory is never linear, "even though planned and directed to attain some degree of systematisation" (Samuel & Vithal, 2011, p.78).

2.3.3 PhD committees/panels as models of supervision

The proliferation of supervision models has triggered further debates on which models best serve doctoral education regarding supervision. The effect has been the sprouting of other models such as the supervision committees/committee model. The PhD committee model is an opportunity created for doctoral students to receive scientific and personal support from an expert committee. It comprises the main supervisor, a member of department chosen by the main supervisor and a member from the faculty. This model is characterised by the inclusion

of highly qualified supervisors on the supervision committees/panels (Petre & Rugg, 2011) where formal and informal interaction with students is encouraged. The authors note that major decisions affecting student progress are "ratified in the formal meetings with the committee" (p.27) while individual supervisors oversee the progress of students on a more regular basis. However, a power play in which the supervisor and committee members wield power over the students could emerge, but a power disequilibrium amongst themselves could also be experienced (Hinchey & Kimmel, 2000). Consequently, imbalances in committees permeates the power play to exhibit their variations at a disciplinary level or the specific field of study. For instance, in natural sciences, the supervisor oversees the doctoral student and guides how the research process should proceed to the PhD committee that presides over his/her work. In both social sciences/humanities and natural sciences, Petre and Rugg (2011) note that members of the committee provide a broad oversight to the students' project as managed by the supervisor. The student and the supervisor have the leeway to select what is relevant thus omitting the rest of the suggestions. In some cases, as we shall see in the empirical chapters, everything from the committee could be ignored.

The model is credited for bringing experts on board, reducing pressure on individual supervisors, exposing students to distilled discussion among supervisors and most importantly, students can effectively use committee members to resolve issues of conflict in the process (Petre & Rugg, 2011). Its weaker side, according to the authors, is that many competing opinions may confuse students, pitting one committee member against the other. Its success depends entirely on how group members deal with challenges.

Even with the weaknesses outlined, some university faculties in South Africa still prefer this model when supervising doctoral students. Given that it is not one of the models

noted by the ASSAF (2010) survey as a practice in doctoral supervision in South Africa, there is the need to interrogate supervisors and students and establish how they function in these contexts and the context impacts on their own beliefs and practices in supervision. Apart from this, there are other issues to consider that PhD committees seem to overlook. Firstly, in a pluralistic society, doctoral supervision seems to embrace collective efforts as a pathway to success. The assumption and basis of its operation is anchored on student academic work with limited regard to other issues affecting students' entire experiences at the university which could impact on their PhDs. Secondly, decisions on the representation on the committee seem to ignore student input. For instance, one participant noted that,

> *The PhD committee… there is not much I know about it. The only thing I see about this committee is that when you forward your proposal, the committee is responsible for reading it. In fact, I have not met this committee so, I don't know much about this committee. So, for me to talk about this committee, it could be very difficult because I have got limited knowledge about this committee (SPh. 6).*

2.3.4 Co-supervision as a model of doctoral supervision

Although the one-on-one model is the most common model found in South African HEIs, the cohort model of supervision is not well developed and comprehensive enough to meet the ever-changing needs of supervision experiences and context at doctoral level. Co-supervision as an alternative model of supervision is included as part of the effort to stall shortcomings of the former models. In postgraduate studies, co-supervision is shaped within an intersecting nexus of different needs and expectations prevalent in the context, namely disciplines, departments, the institution, supervisors, and students. Depending on the discourses behind a specific discipline or a student's research topic and the type of supervisor, departments, within their rules and regulations determine when more than one supervisor

should supervise a single student. Co-supervision in the context of postgraduate supervision is a situation where two or more supervisors are charged with the responsibility of supervising a graduate student as a research degree is undertaken (Spooner-Lane *et al.,* 2007). Against this perspective, two opposing strands of argument can be identified about co-supervision as a pedagogical practice at doctoral level. Arguments in favour of the model posit that students benefit from different perspectives and expertise as supervisors appreciate shared responsibility when handling a student. There is also a fallback for the student in case of sickness or attrition of any of the supervisors (Nightingale, 2005; Moses, 1984). Drawing on the academic discipline, Phillips, and Pugh (1987) state that co-supervision is suitable in the context of interdisciplinary topics of research and when universities deploy such arrangements to train and equip neophyte supervisors with supervision skills and knowledge. Above and beyond, this model in universities is a "result of an imposed hierarchy because of university protocols related to supervision" (Spooner-Lane *et al.*, 2007, p.2). In other words, universities meet their goals of training new supervisors through this arrangement of co-supervision.

In counter arguments, Nightingale (2005) argues that tensions between supervisors and PhD students occasionally arise from issues such as the supervision approaches of each supervisor. These issues could include the nature of interaction between supervisors as well as each supervisor interaction with the student, physical location of the supervisors, personal attributes such as age, gender and ethnicity which could also complicate relations between supervisors, the status of each of the supervisor as well as the variation in depth of skills, knowledge, experience, and seniority of each of the people in a co-supervision relationship. Phillips and Pugh (1987) point to conflicting feedback, pitting one supervisor against the other, and creating petty competitive jealousy as to who takes overall responsibility of the supervision process. University structures and the related reward systems are also

problematic. In some universities, faculty policies tend not to recognise or reward a supervisor who co-supervises students from other departments or faculties (Vanstone *et al.,* 2013; Sá, 2008). Even with such shortcomings, the co-supervision model still plays a crucial role in the domain of doctoral supervision.

While discourse on co-supervision firmly establishes the importance and as well as the limitations of this brand of pedagogical engagement, it also suggests problematic aspects imprinted in the practice. In this context, the nature of interaction forms a point of contestation in circumstances where guidelines are not clearly provided. Power relations between teachers and students, according to Brodkey, as cited by Young & Alvermann (1997), is structured by learning institutions. This suggests that in addition to a powerplay between students and supervisors, a power imbalance in a co-supervision pyramid could occur between neophyte/new supervisors and the main supervisor. Technically, power relations regulate and guide all discourses and social interactions including happenings in co-supervision interactions thus setting "unspoken boundaries and guidelines as to how we are 'supposed' to interact as professors and student" (Young & Alvermann, 1997, p.114). I suggest that such relations similarly set the nature of interaction between two lecturers (professors) in a co-supervision pyramid. Beyond these degenerative manifestations or uses of power, one must realise that the creation of generative tension and contestation as a supervision strategy is an exercise of power, which manifests itself in a relationship that could be disempowering or empowering.

There is a paucity of literature that addresses tension or advantages created in interactions and encounters of the supervisors involved in the South African context. Although studies have singled out the tensions in the way supervisors give separate and

conflicting feedback (Spooner-Lane *et al.*, 2007; Phillips & Pugh, 1987), literature on supervisor experiences with co-supervisors and doctoral students is still scarce. Additionally, there is also limited literature about neophyte supervisor initial experiences in a co-supervision pyramid which means that this study provides the basis for future scholarship addressing some of the gaps in literature. In addition, a review of the University of Johannesburg, Faculty of Education's postgraduate (MEd. and PhD) research information booklet (2013), roles and responsibilities of supervisors in the co-supervision matrix is explained (Faculty of Education, 2013); however, the hierarchy in relationships has not been clarified.

In these models, a variety of strategies are utilised to ensure that students acquire and develop the necessary skills and knowledge spelt out in their programmes. The mastery and inculcation of skills, knowledge, dispositions, and attitudes by the professors to doctoral students are referred to in this study as mediation strategies. The next section thus focuses on mediation strategies adopted by supervisors.

2.4 Supervision mediation strategies

This section examines mediation strategies which supervisors employ when supervising doctoral students. It deals with the *how* of doctoral supervision and raises questions about the motives of the adoption of certain strategies over others. Mediation strategies in this study refers to the intervention mechanisms/methods supervisors use in the process of training students. Strategies include seminars, small and large group discussions, lectures, presentations, class projects and team teaching (Backhouse, 2009).

However, before focusing on each of these strategies, I will first classify and characterise them. In this study, strategies refer to lectures, workshops, seminar presentations or team-teaching events organised by a supervisor and attended by students, also known as 'collective/group-mediation' strategies. In such settings, supervisors use a blend of strategies for the transmission of culture research via a socialisation medium. Strategies such as seminars are paired with peers in the department, groups, cohorts, and other social networks that enhance learning. Culture in this case refers to "the sum of activities - symbolic or instrumental - that exist in an organisation and create shared meaning" (Tierney, 1997, p.3). In using this definition in this context, the department should be conceptualised as a community of intellectuals whose core values are collectively transmitted. The symbolic elements that occur in these strategies range from research proposals to academic papers and doctoral thesis - all of which symbolise academic culture. In this context, socialisation is perceived as a "process through which individuals acquire and incorporate these activities" (ibid; p.3). For instance, when a supervisor organises a writing retreat, an environment is created to teach the craft of scholarly writing. Generally, these strategies nurture collaboration among students, involve other academics and experts, integrates doctoral students in the supervisor's wider network of research and enhance the professional development of the student (Sinclair, 2004). The author defines these approaches as "hands on" and states that supervisors who use these approaches result in "minimum time completion rates" (p.8).

Collective/group mediation strategies are influenced by the context within which they happen. While many studies exist that define contexts of doctoral supervisors, the intersecting model by Backhouse (2009) explains that the disciplinary, academic, departmental, supervisor and the workspace influence the mediation strategy adopted by supervisors. For instance, workshops and conferences are ideal for supervisors as they link doctoral candidates with

accomplished researchers, who are specialised in various knowledge areas, research methods and academic writing. These strategies are more suitable within a disciplinary context. Backhouse (ibid) is however cautious about different disciplines which may influence the adoption of a specific mediation strategy. For instance, teaching the structuring of a proposal in mathematics will vary greatly compared to proposals in other disciplines – particularly in humanities and social sciences. I would add that structuring of proposals and theses vary greatly from one supervisor to another in this field. Seminars are optional but are regarded as mediation strategies employed by doctoral supervisors in some of the universities in South Africa (op. cit). These strategies, though optional, are effective in nurturing student confidence, critical thinking, skills, summarising, and presentation skills (Harris, 2006). Students in this case are given various reading tasks to present before their peers and supervisors which lead to discussions based on the research presented. Seminar sessions, though optional as well, are recommended and are appropriate strategies employed within the context of academic departments.

Supervisors from the same department and working on a similar project, tend to utilise the teamwork mediation strategy. The supervisor assigns tasks to different doctoral students and they occasionally meet or operate as networks in accomplishing specific aspects of the project (Petre & Rugg, 2011; Backhouse, 2009). This is how the workplace context, identified by Backhouse (2009), influences the choice of a mediation strategy.

The second strategy is what I refer to as the ‘individualised mediation’ strategy. This strategy is highly unstructured, closed, and whatever that transpires is discreet between supervisor and doctoral student. Most importantly, some supervisors naturally prefer to work individually and therefore end up supervising students individually (ibid). Generally, all

doctoral students work with a certain lead supervisor, who for instance reads the proposals and advises them on certain pertinent issues (departmental requirements about the shape, scope, size and other technical issue) that are basic requirements (Petre & Rugg, 2011). In this case, the supervisor and academic departmental context play an important role.

Nevertheless, despite the use of collective-mediation strategies, supervisors create time for meetings or consultations with individual students, particularly for discussions regarding certain aspects of the research project at various stages towards completion. Although collective/group-mediation strategies are thought to be more fruitful, according to Sinclair (2004), literature on how they are deployed in South African universities is minimal. Writings by Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) and De Lange, Pillay and Chikoko (2010) have outlined some of these strategies in pioneer studies of the cohort model of supervision as implemented at The University of the Witwatersrand. The ASSAF (2010) report has also reported minimal utilisation of these mediation strategies. It is important to investigate this phenomenon with a view to establishing factors that influence the use of specific mediation strategies.

2.5 Supervision knowledge and skills

Supervising doctoral students requires supervisors to possess essential skills and knowledge related to the task. For instance, the ability to rate students, write academically and think critically, manage human relations, identify weak students, and provide support requires the research supervisor to possess skill proficiency and discipline knowledge. I discuss some of these skills and how they are manifested and developed among students.

Academic writing forms the basis for success in academia. Competent supervisors are essential to the success of doctoral education and hence need the skill to determine student

proficiency in academic writing. For instance, Harris (2006) points out that students who enrol in graduate programmes can read, comprehend, relate texts to their personal experiences and form opinions, but they are lacking in two critical areas: academic writing and critical thinking. This is where there is a disconnect between what is taught as writing at undergraduate level and what is required at the postgraduate level. It is imperative that students are subjected to specific instructions to ignite and sustain scholarly writing skills in their postgraduate programmes (Harris, 2006; Caffarella & Barnett, 2000). Harris (2006) supports this view, stating that both students and faculty assume that undergraduate writing skills are easily transmitted to postgraduate level performance. The author acknowledges that the gap between these two levels of writing is wide and requires some form of intervention from supervisors. Supervisors need to recognise such weaknesses in writing and provide academic research writing support or refer students special academic writing readings (Dowse 2014).

Additionally, supervisors need to develop skills and knowledge in critical thinking. Davidson (1998) highlights the importance of these skills and states that if supervisors themselves lack these skills, their "students may well struggle when they are confronted with having to think critically, particularly in an academic setting" (p.121). Critical thinking skills, according to Dewey 1933 (as cited by Zangenehvand *et al.*, 2014), entail "active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). It is imperative that any supervisor engaged in doctoral supervision be equipped with advanced skills of this nature to successfully guide doctoral students. However, there are reports that a significant number of business schools in some parts of the world are not imparting critical thinking skills to their graduate students despite managing and attending board meetings (D'Angelo,

2012). Questions arise as to what extent South African university supervising fraternity is equipped with such skills for the next generation of scholars.

Other skills needed and are useful to students are related to general socialisation and communication while on campus. Studies have shown that doctoral students are often immersed in a challenging world experiencing "feelings of uncertainty, a lack of clarity, and overall ambiguity with what they [are] doing, where they [are] going…what … await[s] them", as well as tentative career trajectories which should direct them to the labour market (Gardner, 2007, p.721). According to this author, students rely on the grapevine to eke out their academic lives on campus. Such scenarios are indicative of inadequate socialisation and proper communication on issues relating to the doctoral experience. Therefore, skills in the socialisation of doctoral students (as groups or individuals) should not be restricted to the formal "processes through which individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful entry into a professional career requiring an advanced level of specialized knowledge and skills'' (Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001, p.iii). Doctoral supervision is not only about generation of knowledge but also a kind of mutual partnership between supervisors and students that enhances collaboration and willingness to learn (Vilkinas, 2002). Typically, supervisors are more knowledgeable and wield power in supervision arrangements, and Tyler (1998) observes that they need to develop work and industry relationships as they work with doctoral students.

Beasley (1999) maintains that supervisors need adequate management and interpersonal skills to handle the process of supervision. These skills and knowledge are pertinent in coordinating doctoral research activities, mentoring doctoral students, and building research relationships amongst their students (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004). What is

not clear is whether supervisors possess these skills and consciously or unconsciously impart them in South African universities.

Certainly, there seems to be more to doctoral supervision than just training future colleagues in the community of researchers. Complex experiences pertaining to knowledge and skills beyond disciplinary and academic knowledge seem to be central to the process. With these revelations, the next section examines how people become doctoral supervisors.

2.6 Supervisor development

In many parts of the world, it goes without saying that it is expected that doctoral supervisors are holders of PhDs in their areas of specialisation (ASSAF, 2010; Backhouse, 2009; Dietz *et al.*, 2006) and are therefore equipped with skills and knowledge to supervise doctoral students. Supervisor development has become a major subject of discussion in the recent past, particularly some supervisors being discreet about their experience (Grant, 2008; Manathunga, 2008; Park, 2006). Some supervisors argue that knowledge and skills can be learned on the job and hold the view that "supervision is/has been learned first and foremost by trial and error, in the manner of a craft" (Grant, 2008, p.12). Thus, an understanding of supervisor development requires an analysis of supervision development strategies adopted and the dynamics involved in these strategies. Given the multiple approaches to this kind of development, as presented in the literature, two main categories emerge: there are arguments that foreground learning through experience which suggest that supervisors are not trained but acquire and develop the prerequisite skills necessary for supervision. The other category argues for learning through staff development programmes.

2.6.1 Learning through experience

There are two dimensions in learning through experience. The first is the use of their past supervisors as a frame of reference. Some doctoral supervisors may replicate those past experiences, while others may choose to reframe them. These experiences, according to Grant (2010), "reproduce certain kinds of disciplined subjects: scholars, researchers, academics, advanced specialist thinkers in particular fields and (or even cross-field) of established academic knowledge" (p.3) which can enable one to alter the frame of reference depending on the context.

The second mode of learning is scholarship by doing. It has been argued that doctoral supervisors learn supervision skills by doing what their supervisors did. A qualitative study conducted in Sweden found that most supervisors learned the art of supervision on the job with very limited or no support at all from the faculty/department (Halse, 2011). This statement corresponds with the findings of a qualitative study conducted in South African universities by Backhouse (2009). Learning on the job, according to Dietz *et al.* (2006), entails replication of how most of the supervisors were supervised. Generally, learning from personal experience seems to account for the better part of the skills and knowledge required for supervision in the South African context.

Learning to supervise from experience has its benefits but also shortcomings. Studies have shown that supervision at the doctoral level is a private affair, conducted privately by those involved (Kamler & Thompson, 2006**)**. First, given that each doctoral supervisor who learns the skill through experience may learn differently from others, it is an area that needs further and more focused research to ascertain the issue. Second, there are dangers of reproducing the same kind of people who may lack initiative/agency, resist change and

perpetuate the low completion and high rates of dropouts at doctoral level. Contrastingly, although Dietz *et al.* (2006) underline personal experiences as crucial resources that supervisors draw from, little is known about what supervisors deduce as good practices and what they choose to edit out. Third, the supervision process is highly subjective; thus, experiences vary. For instance, current supervisors who claim to have been treated unkindly as doctoral students (Backhouse, 2009) should be interrogated to find out how they currently supervise their students. Knowledge on how supervisors navigate this aspect is insufficient in the South African context and therefore the justification for my study.

Most of the literature on supervisor development through experience continues to grow but it tends to focus mostly on direct skills and knowledge gained in disciplinary areas, namely, research design and methodology. Limited attention has been paid on other underlying attributes and practices that people learn from their supervisors. For instance, supervision may require one, after some time, to develop certain attitudes, dispositions and practices that play a crucial role in establishing relationships and one's confidence in supervisory encounters. Such aspects of supervision may be learnt informally, either through comments (verbal or written, negative or positive), mannerisms and issues pertaining to punctuality, time management, and accessibility. This study seeks to contribute by examining the dimension of learning from experience.

2.6.2 Supervisor development programmes

Another school of thought proposes supervisor development through staff development programmes (Halse, 2011; Pearson, Evans & Macauley, 2008). This refers to situations where postgraduate supervisors are exposed to some form of training to gain and bring their supervision skills up-to-date and be familiarised to the changing trends in the field

of supervision. Manathunga (2005) notes that universities in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia have made it compulsory for doctoral supervisors to attend professional development courses. However, these programmes have generated tension among supervisors and organisers of the programmes. Many supervisors in Europe and South Africa are hesitant to participate in these programmes because the conveners presume "that there are deficits in the supervisors' expertise and this can only be remedied by formal, structured, cognitive transmission of knowledge from instructor to the learner" (Halse, 2011, p.3). Other critics state that such programmes tend to focus on instrumental, administrative aspects of the doctorate, which place emphasis on the rules, policies and regulations of supervision as required by universities (ibid). In the process, they fail to recognise what is critical, that is, the knowledge proficiency gained out of practical experience by supervisors and the contexts they occupy.

In South Africa, universities such as University of Cape Town (UCT), University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) have developed training programmes for research supervisors (Backhouse, 2009). The author notes that these institutions also organise workshops where supervisors exchange ideas and are updated on trends in doctoral supervision. Apart from this, they also provide handbooks that guide supervisors in the process of supervision. Although all these efforts are made to improve the process of supervision, most experienced supervisors dismiss the exercise as futile and a waste of time (Halse, 2011; 2009). This thinking may stem from the fact that when supervisors are trained at doctoral level, they realise that it is the highest level of training that grants them power to supervise. Under such circumstances, one develops the feeling that as a qualified supervisor, there is little need for further training. Another issue could be that institutions do take into consideration the background of doctoral supervisors prior to the

introduction of training programmes and their individual experiences as doctoral students in different institutions in South Africa and elsewhere. Undoubtedly, some have developed prerequisite skills on the job and are resistant to change supervision practices. Studies have also shown that supervisors differ greatly in engagement and the practice of supervision and these differences are more distinct depending on the student and the context of supervision (Backhouse, 2009).

The present study further posits that although literature exists on supervisor training, there is no benchmark for supervisors to follow. Besides, available literature does not clearly state whether by the end of the course, supervisors are able and competent enough to supervise other students at the postgraduate level. This is articulated in a survey by Golde and Dore (2001) to determine whether doctoral students in Arts and Sciences in 27 American universities were prepared for both teaching and research. The study found that students were equipped with research skills and knowledge but were not adequately prepared to teach. The authors also noted that the Arts and Sciences doctoral students claimed that they were unprepared for academic careers. If training on supervision is embedded in the general doctorate studies, it should be explicitly stated so that in addition to contributing knowledge, doctoral graduates are adequately trained to supervise doctorates. An interrogation of supervisors and some of the professional development programmes in the South African context can be unpacked using qualitative approaches to unravel the views about the nature and adequacy of their training as supervisors.

The same study also found that training programmes meant for staff development were despised by supervisors. Strategies used to introduce these programmes, the aims, the implementers, and the context fell short of the expectations of doctoral supervisors. Since

many studies describe doctoral supervision as a private encounter between supervisors and students (Park, 2006; Manathunga, 2005) this explains why each of the supervisors has his/her own ways of supervising. By subjecting these people to programmes that aim to alter their known ways of doing things, it means that they should have a common approach to supervision which contradicts postmodern epistemologies that seem to advocate for individual uniqueness in a specific context. A major problem in the training of doctoral supervisors lies mainly in the absence of suitably consistent training pedagogy. The university can be viewed as an epistemological symptom of a pedagogical problem in the training. These epistemologies acknowledge the importance of contextual realities in pedagogical practice and disallows universal generalisation of these practices.

2.7 Conclusion

The current pedagogical strategies in doctoral education have evolved with time, emerging from the earliest pedagogical model. In engaging with the literature, the central argument in this chapter was that doctoral supervision is an enigmatic, complex process that is shaped by contests, tensions and contradictions that seem to be embedded in the existing debates about how it is conducted. This argument manifested itself into two minor schools of thought which eventually intersected to help in problematising pedagogical practices as experienced by supervisors in South African universities.

The literature revealed that the concept of supervision has attracted many definitions, which agree on the process but differ in the process about the kind of graduates trained and whether they suit the general labour market or academia. The review also explored debates on models adopted in doctoral supervision, revealing tensions between the one-on-one model and the emerging ‘collective’/group model. The one-on-one model of supervision was commonly

found in South African universities despite its limitations. However, literature showed that other models such as the cohort model have been utilised in South Africa with limited success given that the "approach requires funding, infrastructure, and compatibility with the existing research" (ASSAF, 2010, p.65). Other models that seek to address weaknesses that abound in former models, have been introduced. On the use of committees on supervision, there have been no studies to show the successes and failures in South Africa. What remains unclear in the reviewed literature is what new models of supervision are in place and whether they have been deployed by all doctoral supervisors and if so, supervisor perceptions of these models.

Within the models of supervision, supervisors adopt different mediation strategies depending on their own orientation and the context of supervision. These strategies differ significantly depending on the context of supervision. Generally, the continued use of the apprenticeship model and mediation strategy in South Africa seems to contribute to low rates of completion and therefore, fewer PhD production per million per year (Herman, (2011; ASSAF, 2010). Issues of student-supervisor relationships, models of supervision, power relations and the accompanying tensions and contests seem to add to the enigma of doctoral supervision. In addition, the review focused on the skills and knowledge supervisors need to successfully supervise PhDs. Skills, knowledge in academic writing, critical thinking, projects management, managing and resolving conflicts, socialisation and communication skills, work and industry, and research skills and knowledge of a supervisor are crucial. Absence of these skills may constitute challenges and lead to frustration and attrition. A deficit evident in the literature is a systematic way in which supervisors develop these skills and handle conflicts with students.

Literature on the way people become doctoral supervisors was also reviewed. It was found that people either learnt to supervise on the job or learnt the supervision skill by attending supervisor development programmes. What was not clear was how and where these supervisors learnt to supervise and their context of learning.

By exploring debates and discourses, I sought to understand the dynamics within doctoral pedagogical experiences. What the review has not done is to outline and discuss the underlying concepts that can help to explain who a supervisor and a doctoral student are, how they are constituted over time to function in these roles and what criteria supervisors follow so that they exercise power or authority to supervise doctoral candidates. Given that supervisors, doctoral students, and universities are agents that operate in a society, the next chapter pays attention to the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study, with doctoral students, supervisors, and universities**.**

CHAPTER THREE

Understanding the pedagogy of doctoral supervision: theoretical and conceptual foundations

3.1 Introduction

The literature reviewed in Chapter two brought to the forefront understandings and perceptions about doctoral supervision. These understanding and perceptions, when critically conceptualised, merge into how individual supervisors are constituted to discharge their duties and the nature of context within which they operate. To understand these perceptions, understandings and the practice of doctoral supervision, this chapter discusses Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural reproduction and the concept of agency by Archer (1995) as important components of the conceptual framework for an understanding of the complexities surrounding pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities.

To achieve this, this chapter sets out to answer the following question: *What are the key concepts that can best be used to explain pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities?* I argue that personal and contextual factors, as expressed in the cultural capital theory and the concept of agency, are critical in understanding pedagogical practices in doctoral supervision in South African universities. Section 3.2 pays attention to the main sources of tensions and contests that emerge from the literature as generated by the participants in supervision contexts. Section 3.3 presents the key concepts that guide this study as drawn from Bourdieu's (1986) and Archer (1995) concepts. In Section 3.4, I present the theoretical implications of these concepts. Section 3.5. rounds off the chapter with the conclusion.

3.2 Sources of tensions and contestations in doctoral supervision

The tensions and contests highlighted in the previous chapter lead to pedagogical relations in doctoral learning. This is mainly because the pedagogical approaches/models adopted by a supervisor are influenced by social, institutional, and personal factors. It is not practical to find all supervisors adopting the same approach, especially in the context where differences in both students and supervisor backgrounds are extremely diverse in work and past educational experiences. Within these pedagogical approaches is the learning experience of both doctoral supervisors and their students.

The concept of supervision is fraught with ambiguities and understandings that largely, determine what supervisors do and how they do it. The inconsistencies in the meanings of the concept is hardly regarded by those who come up with policies and practices that guide the supervision process, as indicated in Chapter five of this study. Variation in meaning of this concept leads to some key distinctions. One, tensions and contestations can be generative and productive. Conflict undermines effective supervision. For the supervisor, the task is to generate a critical mind in the doctoral student. In so doing, the supervisor controls the process so that it remains a mode of enquiry and steers the learning process without becoming personal, leading to tensions and contestations. Two, tensions and contests can be embraced by the student as a mode of learning and inquiry that means being open to criticism rather than humiliation, suppression and marginalisation and thus should be seen as a form of empowerment. Tension and contestations in doctoral education are the steppingstones of a conducive pedagogy that is driven by the desire to participate in the domain of scholarly enquiry at the highest level. Doctoral supervision is therefore dialectical in nature, merging tensions, contestations and learning at the same time.

Third, another set of tensions relates to supervisor skills and development. It was evident from the review of the literature that various ways exist for supervisors to become doctoral supervisors. The modes of learning supervisory skills and knowledge are also inflamed with tensions and contestations that seem to be grounded in individual supervision orientations and the introduction to the practice of doctoral supervision. Contestations also seem to reside in the power play among supervisors and those who organise staff development programmes for supervisors (Halse, 2011) in what Grant (2008) describes as "power over" supervisors.

The fourth set emerges from the diverse and complex context within which doctoral supervisors operate. As described in Chapter five, this thesis presents a setting in which a supervisor is inculcated and expected to produce a doctoral graduate of certain standards, amid a myriad of contextual factors. Thus, contestations are embedded in issues of quality, throughput, performativity, departmental/faculty expectations, resources, nature of students, knowledge economy and university rankings. My major question is: How do supervisors operate in such an environment?

3.3 Key concepts that guided the study: habitus, capital, and field

This section provides the basis for examination of supervision practices in South African universities in two interwoven perspectives. Firstly, there is a need to understand supervisors and how they are constituted to execute their duties. The second dimension, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter five, pays attention to the context within which they operate as a pertinent influence on the supervision process. Although there are other constructs that can be used to understand supervision and contextual dynamics, this study

draws on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural reproduction and the concept of agency by Archer (1995).

Cultural reproduction theory is crucial in providing explanations of the relationship that exist between original class affiliation and the subsequent class membership and how this relationship is facilitated by the prevailing education system **(**Sullivan & Glanz**,** 2002). Concepts of habitus, capital and field are used to understand how individual supervisors are positioned in the field of higher education to supervise doctoral students in South African universities. They locate supervisors in their context (mainly structured) and explore how they are constituted to discharge their duties. Cultural reproduction theory explains how elements of capital and field intersect in an individual to function in a structured or fluid field that is constituted by several intersecting contexts. In other words, it is an attempt to provide plausible explanations that will shed light on these issues by using the concept of *habitus* advanced by Bourdieu to explore, conceptualise and understand the conjunction between '*the individual'*, the *'work context'* and '*the external world'* (Lee, 2008). For aspects that are not captured by these concepts, I will utilise the concept of agency advanced by Archer (1995).

3.3.1 Habitus

Habitus according to Wacquant (2004), as cited by Navarro (2006), is defined "as the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways which guides them" (p.16). Kemp (2010) notes that "it ensures that social action is performed in an organized and routinized fashion as it immediately excludes interests and modes of acting which do not harmonize with the cultural and social legacy of the collective to which one belongs" (p. 2). It is developed through a social process that leads to lasting and transferrable

patterns that reflect different positions and contexts in the society. An individual's habitus is a product of the intersection between the community, peers and schools which effectively inform an individual's decision-making process (Slack & Thomas, 2002). This process is anchored in sets of dispositions or attitudes, making habitus a "rich interlacing of past and present, individual and collective" (Reay, David & Ball, 2001, p.2) experiences that determine an individual's place, perception and understanding of the world (Grenfell, 2008). The understanding is not however fixed, for Kemp (2010) acknowledges the supple and flexible nature of habitus that renders it transformable under "unexpected situations or over a long period of history" (p.16). In the process, as a function of class, family, and individual experiences, it unconsciously directs individual's behaviour in what Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, p.226) describe as "reasonable" to expect from these individuals. Precisely, habitus is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary for those products of collective history, the objective structures, (for example, language, economy and so forth) to succeed in reproducing themselves completely, in the form of durable dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977, p.85).

Habitus provides for a person's embodied capacity to take on the right attitudes and perform the right action in designated social fields (Tranter, 2006) including the field of doctoral supervision. Social fields are referred to because habitus is not an innate biological capacity but socially and culturally constructed entity "inherited through subtle reinforcements by which a young child enters the practices and relations of family and community" (Zipin, 2002, p.1). It is this kind of socialisation that doctoral supervisors are equipped with as they guide their students.

Theorising doctoral supervision can therefore draw significantly on the concept of habitus. For instance, based on the reviewed literature, issues of understanding, feeling, and meaning of concepts as well as adoption of supervision models are embedded in human behaviour. By what means these issues are understood and handled by supervisors is expressed through durable ways of "speaking…….and thereby feeling and thinking" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 70). There are also issues of relationships upon which doctoral supervision is anchored. Supervisors and students may envisage their relationships either as colleagues in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2008) or as master and servant (Grant, 2008) as depicted in the apprenticeship model of supervision. Supervisors also envision their relationship with management as well as the structures that either facilitate or constrain doctoral supervision/education. These scenarios culminate in issues of power and domination that are either explicitly or implicitly played out in different forms. The tensions generated within the players in doctoral supervision engagements are reminiscent of the fact that habitus "is a kind of transforming machine that leads us to 'reproduce' the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way" and therefore a function of systemic social imbalances that are constantly contested and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.87) in doctoral education via supervision. Furthermore, individual supervisors may act in similar ways or differ significantly. When supervisors conceive the same concept either way, they espouse "habitus within, as well as, between social groups ….to the extent that the details of individuals' social trajectories diverge from one another" (Reay, 2004, p.434; Reay, David & Ball, 2001), revealing individual differences when confronted with the same issue.

However, for both PhD supervisors and students, habitus may be constraining in the sense that they may find themselves in conflict with structures and modes of thinking

inherited from past socialisation processes and entrenched in their academic practices. Supervisors may only reason from the point of view of what they have learned from their own supervisors. Students, as well may also reason from what they learned at master's level that generates tensions which may constrain the exercise. At the same time, institutions, and supervisor (co-actors) formative *habitus* may not be aligned to a fast-changing society in line with trends in the field of supervision. As a result, "the practice of social agents can then appear to be anachronistic (outdated), stubbornly resistant or ill-informed" (Grenfell, 2008, p.52) in the face of change. The challenge of adjustment becomes overwhelming, hence the likelihood of conflict.

In my view, under certain conditions, habitus may possibly be about dispositions and pre-dispositions for change, adjustment, or adaptability. Thus, one's ability to adjust to change and adoption of new ways of acting or behaving reveals his/her ability to adapt. In this regard, the concept can also be prohibiting in explaining the usefulness or impediment of habitus. Thus, habitus is instrumental in understanding how supervisors respond to different issues such as policy change and institutional expectations and the graduates.

3.3.2 Capital

Capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), is an asset that is effective in a social arena that helps people to make use of benefits arising from participation and contest. Depending on the social arena in which one is immersed, capital constitutes a form of resource that individuals draw on to function. Indeed, social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital create the capital resources advanced by Bourdieu (1990) that characterise and sustain positions in specific fields. This study will utilise the concepts of cultural and social capital.

Cultural capital refers to the type of knowledge, skills, education, language, and the merits a person possesses that raise his/her status in the society (Bourdieu, 1986). In the field of supervision, cultural capital inclines supervisors towards a pattern of thoughts and behaviour (Wacquant, 2006) that stems from their training and experience (Halse, 2011) and enables them to traverse through the process of supervision. Bourdieu and Passeron, (1977, p.187) point out that "academic qualifications are to cultural capital what money is to economic capital". However, cultural capital does not always remain stable among supervisors. The competitive nature of the world today requires that skills and knowledge be constantly updated. Literature revealed that supervisors can improve their cultural capital through professional development such as training, seminars, and workshops. These avenues provide specific and general knowledge about student research needs and the relevant skills and knowledge required (European Commission as cited in Halse, 2011; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Lowe, 2002). Cultural capital helps agents and institutions protect their positions, topple the existing distribution of capital in order to be ranked impartially in disciplines, theories, methods and journals globally (Wacquant, 2006); however, many South African universities do not rank well globally (ASSAF, 2010).

There are different forms of cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) assumes some form of investment and is critical in understanding skills and knowledge that are learnt by an individual, and constitutes some kind of "competence"/asset like supervision skills and knowledge that are unique to an individual and merits the bearer in certain unique ways through opportunities in certain fields (Weininger & Lareau, 2007). These assets emanate from learning by doing. The other form, the "objectified" is crucial for individuals in terms of understanding levels of proficiency of the embodied cultural capital. The author stresses that "a philosophy text is an "objectified" form of cultural capital since it

requires prior training in philosophy to understand" (p.2). Its existence in these forms imply certain intellectual resources and discourses that supervisors draw on and exploit to achieve their supervisory objectives. Given the aims and purposes of a PhD and by extension a doctoral graduate, both embodied and objectified cultural capital are critical for supervisors as they guide their doctoral students, particularly in the admission of students, unearthing and presenting new knowledge, understanding and providing solutions to contemporary challenges. It is in these dimension that I deploy this concept. Given that learning is a social process, cultural capital may not be enough to explain the dynamics in doctoral supervision, where one strives to build social capital.

Social capital is "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing some durable networks of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.119). Bourdieu, as cited by Field (2009), states that the value of an individual ties is determined by the number of links that they can assemble, and the volumes of other capitals possessed by each connection. In medical and legal fields for example, Bourdieu observes that members of the medical fraternity take advantage of aspects of social capital such as honourability, social connections and respect to win over their customers which are critical in the case of academic "credential deflation" of an agent (ibid). Social capital is critical in academic discourses for the reason that successful supervision requires scholars to be actively "involved in research and belong to international networks that influence journals and conferences, provide sources of external examiners and act as gateways into academic careers" (Field, 2009; Sambrook, Stewart & Roberts, 2008, p.72). The centrality of social capital is reflected in claims that "South African doctoral graduates are severely isolated and lack exposure to international expertise and debates" (ASSAF, 2010, p.84). Thus, understanding social capital as a set of

networks and relationships that are permeated with attitudes, values, and standards, enhances trust, reciprocity, and associative production of highly qualified doctoral graduates.

In as much as social capital represents assets that both supervisors and students bring to doctoral learning through doctoral supervision, it also involves the building of a particular form of social capital through which doctoral graduates may gain access to and find easy adjustment in academia. Through seminars they can network with peers and other advisers while conferences enable them to network with other colleagues and share their research work, thus attaching value. Conducting interviews with people in positions of power, leads to bonding, linking, and bridging and developing networks (Adhikari, 2008) and are considered activities that are central in building social capital in doctoral education.

From the preceding sections, it is evident that the concepts of capital and habitus can be useful in vetting supervisors and their responsibilities. However, placing them in a specific field where they interact with other supervisors will illuminate the dynamics external to them and how they influence those operations. The next section focuses on the concept of field as an important adjunct of cultural reproduction.

3.3.3 Field as a social space for doctoral supervisors

The concept of field, as advanced by Bourdieu, refers to "the various arenas in which people express and reproduce their dispositions and where they compete for different kinds of capital" (Gaventa 2003, p.6). In this perspective, any field has its own internal mechanisms that enhance self-control and regulation. Consequently, by entering any field, one consciously or unconsciously gets into a *structured* social space of position that operates within certain rules formulated by the field (Grenfell, 2008). Within the field, structures are both tangible

and intangible and determine how people function in such a space. In doctoral supervision for instance, tangible structures include ministries of education, universities, faculties, departments, national agencies and advisory bodies and industries (Boer *et al.*, 2002). These structures are articulated in form of doctoral programmes, academic disciplines, and modes of instruction at doctoral level such as the traditional apprenticeship model of supervision (Kehm, 2006). These structures, according to Backhouse (2009), constitute a system that is governed by both tacit and explicit rules and regulations that govern the operation of a system (in this case, the supervision process). Although these rules sound explicit, a field is considered a game with attached rules or "better, regularities [which] are not explicit or codified" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.98). Thus, the tangible and intangible structural forces constitute the contested area of teaching and learning in which supervisors and their doctoral students are the main group of actors. Universities on their part *oversee* the way knowledge (capital) is disseminated by determining what is considered as 'legitimate' knowledge (Oakley & Pudsey, 1997). The authors observe that in this way, universities design grades and levels of qualification which are crucial in ensuring the reproduction of certain kinds of knowledge. Depending on the perspectives we take, tension generated by the rules and regulations (policies) exist and supervision and administrative structures as well. Tensions may arise mainly from the divergent understandings of the goals and purpose of doctoral supervision, how supervisors envision their roles and the type of graduates they intend to produce, as well as their knowledge, skills and understanding of the rules and regulations that govern the supervision process.

Research in the field (as conceptualised by Bourdieu) of doctoral education has previously attracted studies on the nature of the doctoral education (Woolard, 2002), doctoral attrition (McAlpine & Norton, 2006) and models, pedagogies and student experiences

(Backhouse, 2009) in doctoral education. Most of the studies have focused on students outlining their experiences in the form of models that describe these contexts and how the contexts interrelate (Backhouse, 2009; McAlpine & Norton, 2006). The models provide the basis for outlining the structures that form the contexts shared by supervisors, where a supervisor and a student sit at the centre of supervision as engagement in the university, departments, and other invisible forces that intervene in the process. The understandings transposed from Backhouse's research (2009) states that PhD students share certain contexts while "those who work outside the university, their places of work and possibly their professions are relevant contexts" (p.152). In the case of doctoral supervisors, some will have to reflect on government policy on doctoral education and supervision, others will consider their social context at work and in the wider society and how it influences their work, while others will supervise as they constantly think of the market forces beyond the university as they prepare students for life after graduation. For those in humanities and social sciences, the disciplinary context has become subtler and more intricate. It is being challenged by a "new mode of knowledge production-mode (or transdisciplinary knowledge)" which is fast challenging the traditional disciplinary kind of knowledge (Young, 2008, p.9; Nerad 2007). Young believes that universities may have to transform to cope with the fast-changing mode of knowledge production.

Two dichotomies can be drawn from these matters in the field of supervision. First, there are formal structures that manifest themselves in the form of universities, faculties, departments, and disciplines. These structures are instrumental in designing and deciding on the nature and types of programmes offered by universities at the doctoral level, their duration and the nature of supervision, the people who supervise doctorates as well as the kind of students admitted into the programmes. It is within these structures that supervisors interact

with rules and regulations that govern their practice as supervisors and the disciplinary structures which are constantly under threat of transformation and adaptation in the guise of knowledge being in a state of flux (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992). The second set of structures relate to the conditions in the field in which supervisors operate. These structures are invisible market forces that serve the economic wing of doctoral supervision/education, yearning for graduate skills and knowledge that are of economic value and research output that "can no longer be thought of as solely local or be kept solely inside academic walls" (Nerad, 2010, p.2). These aspects of the field are born out of the incessant "workings of a global economy and the increasing interconnectedness of societies [which] pose common problems for education systems around the world" in which "regional, national and local responses […] vary" (Arnove, Torres & Franz, 2012, p. 1). Thus, depending on the faculty, discipline, research area, and the supervisor, unlimited global and local forces will play out in supervision encounters, calling for an analysis of the extent to which they constrain or enable teaching and learning at the doctoral level.

The concept of field thus brings in the need for contextualisation and recontextualization, as espoused by Backhouse (2009), intersecting context, and focusing on pedagogies of doctoral supervision as practised in South African universities. It seeks to point out how supervisors and doctoral students are positioned in teaching and learning and their backgrounds in education. Hence, the need to consider their background and profiles. This is a key task in the process of contextualisation. Issues of field, its constitution, contextual dynamics, tensions, and contradictions that impact on doctoral supervisors and students as they teach and learn are discussed in detail in Chapter five.

3.3.4 Agency

Agency refers to the intended efforts to plan and to construct a way forward amidst constraints, though not always successful (McAlpine, 2012). Agency can be seen in form of a concerted intellectual, social, material, and practical effort whereby an individual skilfully manages what is ostensibly a complex and difficult situation. This concept has been contested and as a result, a significant number of people dismiss agency and associate it as part of the structure while others see it as completely distinctive from structure (Archer, 2003). The question that has sustained discussions on this topic is the extent to which "organization[s] derives from agency exercised by its members or results from structures enabling and/or constraining such agency" (Clegg, Clegg & Bailey, 2007, p.3). Contestations and tensions emanate from the view that structures are objective while agency is subjective in an ontological sense (Archer, 2003). Agency operates within and beyond the boundaries of structure depending on the nature of the task. Archer notes that operations at this level involve people with characteristics and powers that differ greatly from those vested in social forms. Such characteristics and power, include people's ability to think, feel, deliberate, believe, love, and hold very specific intentions which cannot be obvious in social structures. Thus, doctoral research is not just about writing a thesis, it is also about group, identity change and access. Agency becomes the unlocking key and driver for enabling the achievement of all these goals.

In Chapter five, I consider some of the contexts that can exceedingly influence the process of supervision considering how these contexts are framed in a postmodern epistemological and ontological arrangement.

3.4 Analytical implications

The objective of this study was to establish how pedagogical practices in doctoral supervision are understood in the diverse context of South African universities. Understanding such practices underpins views and opinions of doctoral supervisors and students. The drive for this endeavour is motivated by the perception that people are conferred with doctoral degrees, but little is known about what it takes to earn such qualifications as far as pedagogical engagements are concerned. To further the understanding of what doctoral supervision comprises, we should understand doctoral supervisors and students and the context within which they function. Holdaway (1996) points out that supervision involves equipping students with skills and knowledge in research (writing, reading, reflecting, discussing, providing course work as well as a higher level of skills and knowledge in writing for publication, preparing conference papers, and writing research proposals) among other things. However, depending on the supervisor *context*, engagement can be multifaceted including the aforementioned as well as embracing the roles of a mentor, thus providing emotional support, introducing students to professional and research communities, and managing their doctoral studies. Or as in the case of the one-on-one model of supervision, where a supervisor is regarded as 'critical friend' in situations where students are professionals with many years of experience (Pearson & Brew, 2002). Thus, understanding what supervisors do requires that their background, in relation to their profession and contextual dynamics, be unpacked to unravel the assets and resources embedded in their practice. This requires adequate contextualisation.

The reviewed literature indicated that supervision of doctoral students is a complex process that is contingent on various factors, ranging from personal understandings and conceptions to other factors that manifest themselves in social, intellectual, economic and

political aspects of life at the broader level. On a personal level, Dietz *et al.* (2006, p.69) assert that "every PhD supervisor is different…. Hence, relationships between a supervisor and a PhD candidate are full of idiosyncrasies and peculiarities". Differences emerge in form of the extent to which they are involved in student work, style of interaction (professional or personal), mode of giving feedback (verbal, handwritten, or electronic), and the many aspects (parts) of a research proposal and a thesis (Backhouse, Ungadi & Cross, 2015) including interpretation of some concepts in various disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. Surprisingly, studies have also shown that during their spare time, supervisors differ and express "strange misunderstandings between themselves and their PhD candidates" (Dietz *et al.*, 2006, p.69). To understand supervisors and their professional practice, I deploy the *concept of habitus* to explore how doctoral supervisor and student backgrounds and profiles influence supervisory interactions. As a dynamic, internalised and complex set of core values that direct and guide an individual's daily happenings (Reay, 1998a), Bourdieu frames it as a "power of adaptation …[which] constantly performs an adaptation to the outside world which only sporadically takes the form of radical conversion" (Bourdieu, 1993, p.78). Apparently, an individual supervisor functioning in a department or institution (structures) feels the impact of other people or groups of people as he/she strives to fulfil the designated roles. Given past experiences and histories, supervisors may react differently to different situations and may be receptive to change. Within the framing of this thesis, PhD supervisor and student habitus is credited for providing "action for the social groups [that they] belong to, and much of the time those actions tend to be reproductive rather than transformative" (Reay, David & Ball, 2001, p.2). A few studies have paid attention to the efforts made by individual doctoral supervisors considering the pedagogical practices they adopt in South African universities. The concept of habitus is used on the premise that habits and dispositions acquired from the family and the society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) are crucial ingredients for the successful supervision of

doctorates. Thus, by focusing on specific aspects of the supervisor's background and biography, the concept of habitus is used to investigate doctoral supervisor and student backgrounds, the basis of student-supervisor relationships (power/domination), approaches to supervision, experiences as a doctoral student as useful building blocks for the supervisors' current practices.

In the context of supervision, doctoral supervisors and students are embodied with accumulated knowledge, skills, dispositions, practices, and experiences gained through formal schooling (Jantrasakul, 2010) and experience. Therefore, in addition to habitus, I utilise the *concept of cultural capital* to interrogate and understand supervisor knowledge (training), how they acquire this knowledge, competence, experience, and general performance of their roles. I attempt to show that the quality of graduates being produced in South Africa is low (ASSAF, 2010; Mutula, 2009). The concept of *cultural capital* is also used to cross-examine the nature and scope of training and professional development that supervisors undergo, as this aspect is useful in identifying training needs as well as attitudes and expectations of the training programmes. Furthermore, cultural capital helps to isolate and understand the approaches to doctoral supervision, the mediation strategies associated with them, when and how they are deployed. This quest enlightens us to be mindful that possession of credentials may not, according to Field (2010), indicate that one is an accomplished doctoral supervisor. Lastly, students come in with some level of cultural capital that is critical for the accomplishment of this process. It is partly on some of these understandings that some supervisors feel compelled to exert agency.

Although it is implicit that supervisors engage in a supervisory relationship fully equipped with skills and knowledge necessary for the task, literature indicates that

challenging moments can emanate from a student's topic or student-supervisor relationships that call for personal initiative-*agency*. For instance, Chapters six and seven reveals that a few students who enrol for a doctoral education programmes in South African context can be academically weak and experience difficulties in navigating their studies which often weakens the academic process. Also, universities, departments and the general guidelines place specific timelines for completion without due regard for individual student learning differences. Supervisors are therefore expected to navigate this challenge without compromising the requirements or affecting the student's studies. In such cases, they should 'unfreeze' from their *habitus* and tackle the challenging situation (Cross, Shalem, & Backhouse, 2009). They have "to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1988, p.971) during the supervision encounters. Taken from this perspective, the concept of *agency* is deployed to provide a benchmark for supervisors to deal with the changing nature of knowledge (Young, 2008), to identify challenges of doctoral supervision and improvement in supervision, and to respond to departmental and faculty expectations as well as issues of completion, as proposed in policies. The concept is useful, given individual differences and it is hoped that it will help to identify novel approaches to supervising students from different backgrounds with varied intellectual abilities in the South African context.

The concepts of habitus, cultural capital and agency may not adequately explain the dynamics in doctoral supervision in South Africa. I draw on the concept of *social* capital to explore the nature and role of social networks established by individual or groups of supervisors in doctoral education. Establishing networks at the department and faculty level with colleagues, students and other non-academic staff members can be useful to a supervisor. Beyond the university, supervisors can also establish links with departments and collaborate

with individuals in other universities (Coleman, 1990). In this study, I draw on this concept to answer the following questions: *To what extent are supervisors engaged in the formation of networks? Of what significance are these networks to their work as supervisors? What are the students' attitudes towards these networks? What is the nature, context and types of networks formed?*

In this section, I deploy the concept of *field,* advanced by Bourdieu (1986), to help examine the context in which supervisors operate. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the concept of field has its own internal mechanism that self-controls and regulates itself. To understand the process of supervision, it is imperative that the process is conceptualised within the larger scope of doctoral education. Understanding of doctoral supervision will probably enlighten stakeholders about the environment in which it happens and why it happens that way. To ensure this, reference is made to the intersecting model (Backhouse, 2009) and nested framework (McAlpine & Norton, 2006) that focuses on models, pedagogies, student experiences, doctoral attrition, and retention, respectively. Each of these models outline different contexts that impact on doctoral studies. While these frameworks are instrumental in formulating theoretical understandings of doctoral experiences and practices and their effects on students, they offer a starting point in exploring, explaining, and understanding how context influences PhD supervisors.

In this study, aspects of the discipline, department and faculty, and other abstract contextual issues such as management, the labour market, institutional rules and regulations, ministries of education, business organisations, industries, state agencies, and advisory boards and the established structural relationship between PhD supervisors and students are conceptualised as some of the contexts that shape the pedagogical practices in doctoral

supervision (De Boer *et al,* as cited by Backhouse, 2009). In this regard, these physical and abstract structures represent rules/regulations and resources which are realised during supervision interactions (Held & Thompson, 1989). Rules refer to procedures established to preside over and regulate operations in each practice in social life. Resources are either human in the sense of knowledge, physical strength, dexterity and emotional obligation or non-human in visible, inanimate objects/structures that occur naturally or are man-made and are essential (Bourdieu, 1986) in facilitating or impairing human action. Within these contextual frameworks, existing structures should either be enabling human agency by linking rules and resources or as some form of "constraint on practice, and itself made up of practices" (Outhwaite, 1990, p.66). Hence "structures are critical because they enable us to act as well as delimit the course of possible action" (Held & Thompson, 1989, p.4). I deploy the concept of field to enable understanding of the intersection and interplaying of a selected set of visible and invisible contextual factors in the field of doctoral education during the supervision process.

Focusing on the way supervision is carried out in the context presented here, using the concepts of habitus, capital, agency and field, I hope to look at the operations of a doctoral supervisor as an individual and what he/she does and how context converges. It is at this point of intervention that human action and social structures determine their success or failure. Consequently, various interested parties raise issues about the quality and quantity of doctoral graduates that are produced in South African universities, devoid of the process involved in the training context. These concepts, as illustrated in the following figure, are critical resources in determining how social agents in a field of social action perform their roles - in this case in doctoral supervision. Thus Figure 3.1 represents the theoretical framework of the process of supervision.

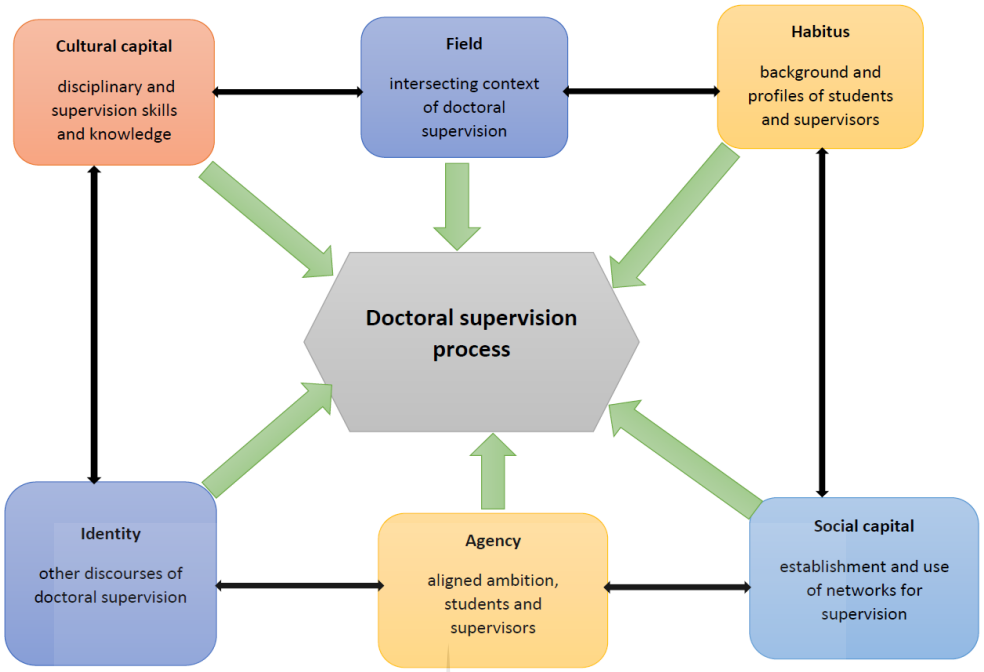

Figure 3.1: Theoretical framework

Source: Created by the author

I argue that personal and contextual factors as expressed in the cultural capital theory and the concept of agency are critical in understanding pedagogical practices in doctoral supervision in South African universities.

3.5 Conclusion

The chapter recognises that personal and contextual factors, as expressed in the cultural capital theory and the concept of agency, are critical in understanding pedagogical practices in doctoral supervision in South African universities. Personal in the sense that each supervisor approaches doctoral supervision depending on the supervisor's schooling and how he/she was supervised. In alignment, the context of supervision was crucial for that

engagement. Given that supervision interactions are human, depicting human conduct in diverse situations as reflected in literature, comprehending pedagogies required a review of concepts that explain doctoral supervisor and student behaviour in a specific context. To this extent, I reviewed the concepts of habitus, capital, field (Bourdieu, 1986) and agency (Archer 1995) as key analytical tools in supervision engagement. Habitus, the review found, can be used to clarify how supervisors' backgrounds, training and experiences position them for their current assignments. Cultural capital is instrumental in explaining supervisor competencies and how they utilise these skills and knowledge during supervision. Similarly, social capital is crucial in explaining how supervisors operate in diverse networks and how productive these networks are to their institutional supervisory engagements. Supervisor habitus and capital are expressed during the supervision process in a specific context, characterised by certain contextual features. However, even with the concepts of capital and habitus, the field may face other challenging situations that call for new and creative approaches on the part of the supervisor. To address this, the concept of agency, as advanced by Archer (1995), was reviewed. Thus, the review identified the concept of field as critical in understanding pedagogical practices deployed by supervisors and how context influences their operations, options and successes/failures within certain tangible and intangible structural relationships. It is crucial in unpacking the intellectual, institutional, and social spaces that inform the expression and reproduction of supervisors' dispositions as they compete for capital (Gaventa, 2003). In so doing, it provided a framework for the adoption of the qualitative approaches and case study designs in conducting this study.

In this study, human aspects and contextual factors have a greater bearing on how doctoral supervision is done. Approaches to doctoral supervision are manifestations of the interplay of forces that lie within individual and his/her context. The interplay of these forces

influences the decisions made as teaching and learning takes the centre stage. It is these underpinnings that will be used to analyse both theoretical and empirical literature in this study. But before I engage in data analysis process, I explain in depth why and how the data were collected in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Reflections on the mode of enquiry

4.1 Introduction

The chapter is a reflection on the mode of inquiry adopted in this study. A reflection on the mode of inquiry, (otherwise referred to as research design and methodology) presents and explains the epistemological basis that guided the entire study, the research approach, design, methods of data collection, validity, reliability and analysis as well as field experiences during the research process. In short, a reflection on the mode of inquiry is what is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as "a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry, and second to methods of collecting empirical material" (p. 22). Before discussing these aspects of the mode of inquiry, the study briefly focuses on qualitative study and its relationship with the interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It agrees with Lincoln and Guba (1985) observation that a paradigm is made up of an epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology. Thus, in selecting the paradigm used in my study, I was guided by these vital beliefs and it was important to have a clear understanding of these elements.

The reflections on the mode of inquiry expressed in this chapter was a departure from what most studies found in University of Johannesburg library. In these library, while most studies refer to this chapter as 'Research design and Methodology', a phrasing that I used in my research proposal, in writing this thesis 1 sought to avoid replicating my own proposal and instead emphasised on reflecting on and theorising the research process in its complexities.

By understanding this mode of inquiry, I was able to conduct a qualitative study that was fully determined by the participants (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

With this understanding, this chapter seeks to answer the following question, *what research approach, design and methods can be best used to answer the main question in this study and why?* In responding to this question, I argue that although a good research plan was developed and justified at the onset, the reality in the field occasionally reschedules what was initially planned. The impression made in this chapter is that understanding a process is procedural and necessary steps for understanding should be consistently taken without missing a step, but with the researcher making the necessary adjustments to facilitate clarity in the process of understanding. The rationale is to try and bring to the fore the authenticity of the research experience that means merging theory and practice. The chapter begins with the epistemological orientation in Section 4.2, followed by subsequent sections.

4.2 Epistemological orientation

This study sought to explore and understand how supervisors supervise doctoral students in the context of South African universities. According to Moore (2004), a research process requires epistemological orientation to help establish the nature of knowledge that is reliable and to ascertain how a researcher can guarantee that this knowledge is both sufficient and justifiable. This is crucial in qualitative research where researchers and participants interact in the creation of meaning, knowledge, and reality that is highly dependent on personal feelings, thoughts, experiences, and actions (James & Busher, 2009). This study draws on some aspects of postmodern theory that are common in qualitative research studies. Postmodernism is recognised as a wide and inclusive concept that exemplifies raising critical questions and opposing what is thought to be championed by Modernism (McLaughlin,

2003). Available literature regards Modernism as a composite, contested and confusing term that has not attracted a concrete single definition (Klages, 2003; McLaughlin, 2003; Weedon, 1997). This lack of attraction of a single definition makes it appropriate when considering a specific locality (case) or context. Lack of a definition responds to its call to refrain from grand narratives of the Modernist perspective and focus on theories that are contextually bound. This explains why "pluralism, indeterminacy, incredulity towards meta-narratives, agnosticism, deconstruction, innovation and change are at the centre of the concept of postmodernism" (Khalid, 2008, p.4). Thus, this study utilises some aspects of postmodernism to the discovery of knowledge given its locality.

Postmodernists believe that language plays a crucial role in the construction of reality (Martusewicz, 2001). Therefore, in the present study, it is implicit that doctoral supervisors constructed realities due to their constant interaction with their doctoral students in each environment and in so doing, developed themselves, transforming and interpreting supervision in the best way to suit their conditions. Language played a significant role in my analysis because it acted as the conduit to their experiences. I was also influenced by the assumption that, although differences exist among peoples' perceptions of reality from factual information given by an individual, such differences reflect the values cherished by that particular person (Maree, 2007). The idea of "a fixed, eternal and foundation of reality" (ibid, p.64) does not exist. Reality in this case is a function of a varied dynamic culture, which is displayed by doctoral supervisors and their students in a particular context.

Epistemologically, I set out to investigate pedagogical practices in doctoral education with the understanding that knowledge is socially constructed, and truth is "…necessarily relative to the context within which it is constructed" (Moore, 2004, p.55). Consequently,

meaning is realised, acknowledged, and passes for reality out of human social interaction that draws more from the individuals' values, aspirations, past experiences, and backgrounds (Martusewicz, 2001). This implies that reality has multiple layers and knowledge is personal, subjective, and unique to individuals (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The assumption elucidates the discourse of case studies and how individual cases are examined in detail for meaning to be constructed. This provides an opportunity for social groups whose voices are hardly heard (to speak for themselves) and in their own words and validate their own individual social experiences and meanings (Huyssen, 1986). In such situations, case study designs allow for an in-depth description of a participant/subject (Merriam, 2002) through interviews, document analysis, and examination of artefacts. Lastly, *value*-mediated epistemologies recognise researchers as part of the research process and this interaction between researchers and respondents, according to Guba and Lincoln (2000), has an impact on the investigator. This interaction is critical because it guides the researcher interpreting the specific actions, practices, experiences, and individual behaviour with respect to the phenomenon under investigation as well as the lens through which data is examined.

4.2.1 What are the implications of these assumptions on my study?

The assumptions above have some implications on my study. Firstly, the reliance on language locates truth in line with qualitative studies that are inductive in nature and allows researchers to make observations, establish patterns prior to formulation of theories or propositions from the data. These theories or propositions are not generalised to the entire population. For instance, the current study cannot be generalized to other universities faculties of education. Secondly, the context of the study and the dynamic nature of the society is crucial to the subjects in their natural context to provide meaning. Thirdly, I also wanted to understand issues of pedagogy at the doctoral level as conceived and practised by the

participants. The outcome was that the participant approaches, practices, and contexts would result in diverse responses that would allow for the harmonisation of shared views and the description of divergent views. It is on this basis that I found case study designs in qualitative research appropriate for this study. The interviews, observations, and document analysis formed the methods of investigating pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities. The next section describes the qualitative approach as a tradition that favoured this study.

4.3 The qualitative research approach

Qualitative approaches have been discussed at length by many researchers and research experts. Most of these researchers partly (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; McMillan & Schumacher, 1993) juxtapose qualitative and quantitative approaches to research, outlining their differences. Outstanding in most of the literature is the qualitative and quantitative nature of the data that is collected. Some authors have focused on the empirical phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, protocol analysis and discourse analysis as qualitative studies (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). As pointed out by Polkinghorne, (1983) all these methods rely on linguistic rather than numerical data and employ meaning-based rather than statistical forms of data analysis. Mack (2005) further observes that qualitative studies are more flexible, collect non-numerical data, and rely on interviews, observations, and field notes as the main methods of data collection. It is for this reason that my study acknowledges the robust debates of the qualitative and quantitative studies but focuses on qualitative research approach.

Qualitative approach is a broad and unique approach to the different disciplines that employ it **(**Guba & Lincoln, 2000). However, qualitative research poses some challenges

when assigning a definition (Ritchie *et al.*, 2013). Owing to its breath and conflicting nature with numerous characteristics, Ritchie *et al.* (2013). describe qualitative research as a "naturalistic, interpretative approach, concerned with exploring phenomena 'from the interior' and taking the perspectives and accounts of research participants as a starting point." Although qualitative studies show diversity in their practical application, Denzin, and Lincoln (2011), as cited by Ritchie, *et al.* (2013), describe it as:

> a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self … qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p.3).

In this study, aspects of qualitative study are utilised in the interpretive domain. The study, using qualitative understanding, as described by Denzin and Lincoln, focuses on doctoral supervisors and their students in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret doctoral supervision and how they learn. The unique aspects such as the methods employed (fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos) make it useful to the current study. Some of these methods of research are used and followed by a particular interpretation.

Interpretive aspects of qualitative approach focus on the collected data using fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos. Using some of these methods to gather data. Thanh and Thanh (2015) observe that the interpretation of data gathered leads to proper understanding in specific context. To achieve this, the interaction between the researcher and the participant leads to the building reality. Thus, understanding the context of doctoral supervision is imperative in my research. Accordingly, a researcher engages in research fully "accepting and seeking multiple perspectives, being open to change,

practicing iterative and emergent data collection techniques, promoting participatory and holistic research, and going beyond the inductive and deductive approach" (Willis, Jost & Nilakanta, 2007, p.583). The interpretive aspect of this study also recognises individual differences and experiences of those involved in doctoral education in the faculties and schools of education, thus, the ability to understand and utilise the qualitative methods, as stated elsewhere in this thesis. The need to interpret the world in the perspective of the participants led to the selection of an interpretive qualitative approach for this study.

4.4 Interpretive qualitative approach

Positioning this research within a paradigmatic framework is a vital task that will lead the researcher to "reflect upon the broader epistemological and philosophical consequences of his or her perspective" (Perren & Ram, 2004, p. 95). Thus, research paradigms have assumptions, strategies, limitations and methods, and ways in which quality of the resultant research is evaluated differs. While within the framework of qualitative approaches, interpretivism is based on "a life-world ontology that argues that all observation is both theory- and value-laden and investigation of the social world is not, and cannot be, the pursuit of a detached objective truth." Ponelis, (2015, p. 537). Thus epistemologically, the vantage point of interpretivist paradigm is that my knowledge of reality is socially constructed by human actors (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). This aspect helps to justify the use of interpretive qualitative approach for the study.

As such, this study involved interacting and listening to doctoral supervisors and their students narrate their stories and my duty was to interpret them. Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter two, the views on qualitative studies and the postmodern epistemology, the interpretive qualitative research approach was considered appropriate for this study. This was also partly because qualitative research approaches, according to Denzin and Lincoln

(2000), is an all-encompassing term that describes a set of methodologies that are concerned with explaining social events, actions and practices as well as experiences using various descriptions and interpretations. It involves learning how individuals experience and interact in their social world and the meaning they derive from these experiences (Merriam, 2002).

The suitability of this approach was particularly based on several fronts. Firstly, I sought to understand doctoral supervision as a social phenomenon from the supervisors' point of view, in a context where supervision takes place (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). Secondly, I perceived the "world of reality [as] neither fixed, single, nor agreed upon" (Merriam, 2002, p.3) to assume that doctoral supervisors experienced their roles in a similar measurable and uniform way. An understanding of their engagement required an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) to "understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there" (Patton, 1985, p.1), which occasionally may differ among supervisors and doctoral students. In addition, in qualitative studies "there are multiple constructions and interpretations of reality that are in flux and that change over time" (Merriam, 2002; p.4). This perspective favours an interpretive qualitative approach for this study.

Finally, in qualitative research designs, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2003). This understanding allowed me to enter the world of the participants, through the subject or phenomenon that I was investigating and actively participate in the generation of meaning (Parker, 1992). Based on these reasoning, interpretive qualitative approach as part of the wider qualitative research approach was deemed best for investigating pedagogies of doctoral supervision. Within the qualitative research tradition, I settled on case study designs.

4.5 Case study design

A case study is an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1998, p.27). It provides a detailed analysis and deep understanding of a phenomenon in a particular environment. It also allows the researcher to explore individuals or organizations, through complex interventions, relationships, communities, or programs (Yin, 2003). It ensures that the "issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). With this understanding a case study design, adopted in the current study, is anchored on a set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods of data collection and positions investigators in certain sites, people, groups and other relevant documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

A case study design was selected to investigate the faculties/schools of education in selected universities in South Africa. This is the site where supervisors and their students engage in teaching, training, and learning (Eisenhardt, 1989). I adopted this design mainly because of the following. First, I was influenced by Hycner's (1999) writings which state that the phenomenon under investigation determines the method of data collection and type of participants. Second, typical case studies are characterised by a selection of a single case or a small number of cases, the study of these case(s) in its (their) context(s), and the collection of information using a range of techniques such as observation, interviews, and document analysis (Robson, 1993). Third, a case study was a valuable instrument for understanding human behaviour in detail (Stake, 1995). Fourth, given that I was focusing on supervision and human subjects, this approach proved appropriate in investigating a current complex social phenomenon involving human relationships with unclear boundary between it and its context (Creswell, 2002). Fifth, a case study design was deemed useful when answering the *how* and

why questions and understanding the dynamics that characterise contemporary settings (Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989). Finally, case studies are generally convenient in studies where a researcher is guided by theories or concepts that direct the investigation and analysis of data (Meyer, 2001).

Since doctoral supervision is a long pedagogical process involving supervisors and their doctoral students, I adopted a multiple case design. The case study was conceived as a "comprehensive investigation into a bounded system including sets of activities, events, processes or individuals based on extensive data" (Creswell, 2002, p. 439). In my case, I conceived faculties and departments as bounded systems with supervisors and doctoral students engaged in an active process of supervision from selected universities in South Africa. Consequently, they provided the information needed for this study.

4.6 Study population, sample, and sampling procedure

A study population is "the totality of persons from which cases may legitimately be sampled in an interview study" (Robinson, 2014, p. 1). Thus, in a population, some factors qualify or disqualify some people to or from participating in a study. As such, a relatively small, but carefully selected individuals that would effectively describe the phenomenon under investigation, its knowledge, and experiences (Asiamah, Mensah & Oteng-Abayie, 2017) was made.

Basically, the population for this study included all doctoral supervisors and their fulltime doctoral students registered in the faculties/schools of education at the University of The Witwatersrand and the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Selection of this

population was informed by several factors: first, these universities are among the top nine universities that produce the highest number of doctorates in South Africa (ASSAf, 2010) and therefore it fulfilled the need to explore and understand the procedures supervisors use to carry out their responsibilities. As a doctoral student in the faculty of education at one of the institutions and the proximity of these institutions in terms of distance made it convenient and fiscally wise for me to carry out the study. Given that the study was not concerned with drawing comparison about supervision between institutions, but instead exploring the process with the aim of understanding how doctoral supervisors experience supervision in South African universities, insights from only these institutions would be useful, although not generalisable even if doctoral supervisors serve as external examiners for different universities in and out of South Africa. Second, I also realised that accessing doctoral students and supervisors who met the stipulated criteria from a single university would prove to be difficult, and as a result, a second institution was included in the sample. However, out of these two institutions, I only sampled doctoral supervisors and fulltime PhD students from the faculties/schools of education. Having been a doctoral student at both institutions, I found it logical to limit my study to the faculties/schools of education. Doctoral supervision in these faculties/schools were similar, hence necessitating their choice. Finally, Backhouse (2009) acknowledges that teaching the structuring of a proposal in mathematics will vary greatly compared to proposals in humanities and social sciences. Hence, this choice was made to cater for faculties/schools of education that had similarities in graduate supervision.

4.6.1 The sample

Given that very few studies cover an entire population, events, individuals, groups of subjects or situations, samples must be selected from a larger population (White, 2006) in order to satisfy the needs of a particular study. The sample for this study was selected as

follows: First, the faculties/schools of education were conveniently and purposively sampled (Yin, 2011), as the understanding was that doctoral programmes differ significantly between and among, faculties and departments (Backhouse, 2009). With this perception in mind, I found this sample ideal for the study. Second, pedagogical practices may vary from one faculty/department to the other, therefore, members in the faculty of education were thought to be suitable participants given the close relationships in education disciplines. Third, faculties differed in terms of their *habituses* and capital hence the selection of this sample. Furthermore, the faculties/schools of education selected had well established doctoral programmes that had been in operation for more than thirty years. This consideration is in alignment with Frost's (2011) view that participants "must have some relationship with the activity you are studying" (p.27). Overall, I felt that the practice of supervision could best be understood by selecting sites that could help to understand the phenomenon better (Creswell, 2002).

The next level of sample selection were the people who participated in the study. I deliberately sampled nine lecturers and six doctoral students from the faculties/schools of education at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Johannesburg. The selected lecturers had supervised in the doctoral programme for more than ten years. The rationale behind the selection of experienced supervisors was that doctoral studies take a long time, an average of 4.5 years according to ASSAF (2010), and these subjects were fitting for the study for they had supervised at least a minimum of two doctoral students in the faculties/schools of education and hence were considered 'information rich' to provide the required data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). These supervisors were not only experienced but had a wealth of knowledge in their disciplinary areas. As for the students, since supervision experiences are realised during the interaction between supervisors and doctoral

students, a similar pattern was adopted in terms of the length of their stay with the faculty and whether they had a full-time or part-time status. The inclusion of doctoral students was informed by the supervisor experiences and responses which were verified by student revelations, approval, or disapproval of what happens during the process. I also thought that given PhD students interactions with supervisors, it was possible that they had knowledge on how the process could be improved or what they felt were outstanding practices that could be institutionalised. Since my study focused on doctoral supervision, I needed a supervisor who had supervised doctoral students for a long period, so I targeted full time doctoral students who had been in the programme for more than two years and were either writing their data chapters or finalising their theses. Finally, the selection of students was crucial because their voices were intended to provide a clear sense of what they engaged in, the reasons for engagement and how these engagements impacted their doctoral studies. Six doctoral students participated in the study.

The foregoing section reveals that the sample selected was relatively small. In making the decision for this sample size, I was guided by the information density among the respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the view that qualitative studies pay more attention to perspectives of the respondents regarding the phenomenon under investigation **(**Hatch, 2002). Such a small sample facilitates an in-depth exploration and description of participants' experiences (Martens, 2010; Munhall, 2007) of a phenomenon under investigation. In this regard, I intentionally selected participants who had experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Kruger, 1988) and institutions that had established long-term doctoral programmes in education.

4.6.2 Accessing the participants (sampling)

Having selected the specific group of people to participate in my study, the other challenge lay with how to gain access. Although I was familiar with most of the staff members who were involved in supervising doctoral students and could provide the information that I needed, it was especially difficult for me to personally identify supervisors who had supervised PhDs for more than ten years. I thought of snowballing, which is a means of increasing the sample by asking a participant to recommend others for interviewing and the natural way of knocking on people's doors (White, 2006) to seek audience and then make appointments. Both approaches worked for me. Through snowballing, I accessed some participants in both sites of the research. At Wits school of education for instance, the first two participants (a student and a supervisor) directed me to one and three students and supervisors in the school, respectively. The supervisor at Wits gave me a list of three names and email addresses but warned*: 'Try this, but it is going to be difficult for you'* (Hilda). This remark implied that not many supervisors would be willing to participate in this study. At the Faculty of Education at UJ, my first participant to interview among supervisors was a matter of luck. For this case, it was someone I had met after he presented a paper in a seminar at UJ. I approached him, introduced myself and explained what I was doing and invited him to participate in my study. He accepted my request and an appointment was made by email. My second interview at UJ was even more difficult. My appointment with the supervisor was fixed after he interviewed me for more than thirty minutes! I requested him, later, to refer me to another more experienced supervisor at UJ, which he did. Sampling doctoral students at UJ was largely a matter of contact and personal networks that I had established over time. The first student to participate was an acquaintance with whom we would discuss education issues and he did not hesitate to participate. He was very instrumental in my study because he also introduced me to other students who had journeyed with him for more than three years.

Although snowballing is an instrumental approach in identifying participants, it works differently with different groups of participants. For instance, I learnt that not all the supervisors and doctoral students recommended were willing to participate in my study. With this realisation, I changed tact and instead, 'walked' into supervisors' offices, sought an audience, and discussed the action plan I had prepared for the research. Most participants met the criteria but insisted that they were too busy to participate while others were willing to participate but ran short of the needed experience. Overall, I managed to access more supervisors using the method of walking in than the snowballing approach. In the next section, I focus on data collection and research instruments.

4.7 Data collection and research instruments

Data collection from the sampled participants aimed at developing systematic research evidence and establishing a wide range of evidence that looked at both confirming and disconfirming the data (Hartley, 2004). I employed a combination of tools and methods for data collection in this study because I needed to ensure a detailed description of the tasks, activities, and other engagements that supervisors utilised in their contexts to produce PhD graduates. The review of literature provided the basis for contestation in the doctoral supervision and the deficiencies in knowledge would be exposed. Parallel to the review of literature, the trends in doctoral supervision were the review of policy and practice documents which were very helpful as they tightened the literature about institutional practices on doctoral supervision and government expectations. These two sources of data suggested that policy and pedagogical practices in doctoral supervision could only be understood by engaging those who were directly involved in doctoral supervision in South African universities. With this understanding, there was a need to not only use interviews to expose supervisor and student experiences, opinions and views about supervision, but also conduct

observations and take brief fieldnotes on the context of the interview and document other non-verbal communication cues (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). These communication cues were vital in understanding the details and context of the interviews. The supervisors' offices and for some, the boardrooms became the context within which the interviews were conducted. Like supervisors, most of the student interviews were conducted in offices at UJ and Wits. At Wit school of education, it was apparent that most doctoral students had offices from which they operated. In UJ, out of social relationships (social capital), PhD students would have access to some offices at specified times of the day from their colleagues for those who worked part-time, and for those who worked out of the department, they were provided with space for working. It is within these offices that some preferred to be interviewed. Yet for other students, they insisted on being interviewed in their own places of residence. Overall, the five research methods as presented in the following figure were used for data collection. They are discussed in the succeeding sections.

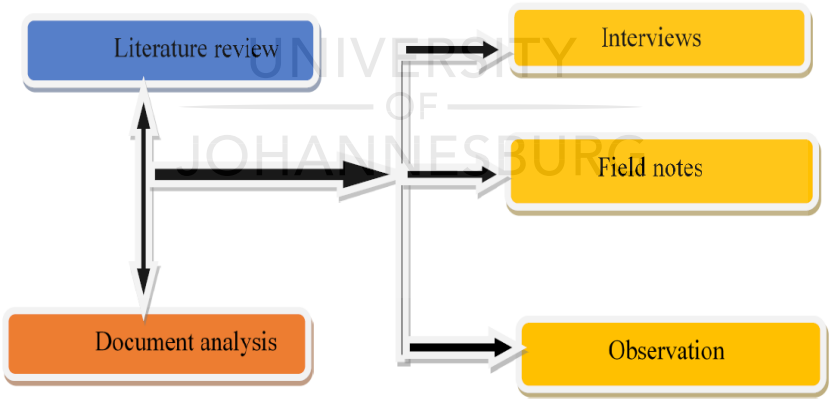

Figure 4.1: A conceptualised outlook of the data collection process

Source: created by author

4.7.1 Extensive literature review

A comprehensive search for literature in the library and the electronic journals, books and papers housed in the University of Johannesburg library websites was conducted. The following databases formed the basis of my review: recent research papers, published books and theses on doctoral and higher education in and out of South Africa, South African policy papers on higher education, reports by individual institutions of higher education, reports on doctoral student and lecturer participation in research, and other sources that were relevant to this study. The terms qualitative research on higher education or qualitative studies on doctoral education/supervision globally and in South Africa were used. For electronic searches, I continuously did the review by punching in the computer the key terms of the review. The rationale for the literature review was to adopt "a systematic, explicit, and replicable method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work produced by researchers, scholars and practitioners" (Blexter, Hughes & Tight, 2006, p.122). It provided the basis for widening the scope for extensive understanding of the expansive field of doctoral supervision, the context of supervision, as well as the different concepts that can be used to understand the people involved in doctoral supervision. With this review, I gained an understanding of current trends in the field thus helping me to identify the gaps for this study.

Overall, engagement with related literature revealed a range of dynamics, structures, practices, meanings, and contexts that at times converge to the benefit of supervisors or present a dilemma for supervisors. The current dynamics were shaped by the increasing number of stakeholders in doctoral degrees that seemed to create tension between original objectives of doctorates in academic context to PhDs that are more responsive to the labour market. The review also indicated the tensions that exist in the meaning and models of

doctoral supervision, in a context that is desperately striving to address past educational challenges, and quickly transform to a fast-changing model of doctoral education that is modelled after the West. With the need to produce more PhDs in the South African context, the literature took me into the least organised spaces, where PhD supervisors are expected to provide supervisory services. The literature also directed me to the writings of Bourdieu (1986), whose conceptual tools of cultural capital theory provided an understanding of the kind of PhD supervisor and doctoral student that was operating in the South African context.

In the context of doctoral supervision, the research offered several revelations and shifted my way of thinking about postgraduate education. Firstly, my own fulfilling supervision experience at the master's level was dwarfed by the complexity of factors that influenced the discovery and generation of knowledge. For instance, a PhD candidate transforms into a full researcher. The literature converged both local and global dynamics, traditional and professional doctorates, PhDs for academics and PhDs for the labour market as well as disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge. Secondly, based on the review, I came to understand that supervisors had the daunting task of harmonising student perceptions and experiences at master's level in a gradual manner as they prepared them for their new roles as independent researchers. In the process, most doctoral students, both locally and globally interpreted the better part of the experience as limiting and frustrating. Thus, during the interviews, it became clear that structural constraints and demands within disciplines, institutions at national level and among supervisors were instrumental either in stifling or providing the highway to successful doctoral supervision. Overall, my determination to explore and understand pedagogical practices at doctoral level in the South African context was shaped by my understanding of supervision emerging from the literature perspective and multi-pronged background, yet intersecting contexts that are invisibly imprinted in the minds

of supervisors who determine approaches to supervision. Yet there were other written rules and expectations, some known and others unknown to both doctoral students and supervisors with some of the policy and practice documents were found on shelves in supervisor offices and in student apartments.

4.7.2 Document analysis

Educational practices in many parts of the world follow a doctrine specifically prepared by government ministries or institutions mandated to preside over education. In post-apartheid South Africa, the structure and nature of higher education is founded on documents such as the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF), Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education, the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) and the National Research and Development Strategy (NRDS) among others. In conducting a study on supervision of doctoral students in South Africa, it was necessary to analyse documents that form the basis and motivation for doctoral education and doctoral supervision. The document analysis method involved "analysis of documents that contain information/phenomenon we [I was] to study" (Mogalakwe, 2006, p.221).

Creswell (2002, p.219), reports that documents "provide valuable information in helping researchers understand central phenomena in qualitative studies". For this study, I collected documents from government and university websites, the UJ library, faculty, and departments of education as well as from some of the participants who gave me useful documents for my study. While I personally collected web documents, I requested administrative assistants in the faculty of education at the University of Johannesburg and the Wits School of Education to assist me in locating documents that pertained to doctoral studies and the practice of supervision in the respective faculties/schools of education. Since my

study primarily focused on doctoral pedagogical practices, the documents I analysed and were in my protocol included PhD admission requirements, programme brochures and supervision practices memos/booklets.

These documents were significant in my study in several ways. The documents displayed on universities websites indicated the number of academic staff members with PhD qualifications, thus allowing me to identify the departments within the faculties that offered doctoral studies. I was able to verify what was stipulated as the admission criteria and other practices that were followed to admit doctoral candidates. While the admission criteria stated the duration of the programme, exceptions were made to those students who faced personal challenges which inhibited the completion of the programmes, as stated. In such cases, they requested the faculty to allow them (students and supervisors) more time. Other documents such as the agreement signed initially between students and supervisors, although binding, were not discussed by either doctoral supervisors or PhD students as most PhD students feared repercussions for not meeting the deadlines.

Documents analysed were written in English with ideas well thought out and refined, lending themselves to immediate analysis without any form of transcription (Creswell, 2002). Wellington (2002) argues that documents can be "used to open up an area of inquiry and sensitize researchers to the key issues and problems in that field" (p. 113). I used some of these documents to further substantiate and understand details about doctoral supervision, an engagement that further reinforced and supported the data that I obtained from other sources, thus making a case for further investigation.

4.7.3 Interviews

The suitability of interviews was based on the understanding that they depict a narrative that you would not typically capture in a quantitative study. Charmaz (2006) points out that interviews are powerful avenues through which peoples' lived experiences can be established by exploring metaphors, environments, and meanings of unique experiences. Given the wide spectrum in structured and unstructured interviews, I settled for the semi-structured interviews for this study.

Appropriateness of semi-structured interviews was twofold: firstly, out of the literature review, I had identified certain themes **(**Charmaz, 2006) that I sought to pursue in this study. I then prepared an interview protocol consisting of a blend of both open- and closed-ended questions which addressed some of these themes, and other questions emanated from the interview sessions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Given my interest in extracting people's held beliefs and practices, their interpretations, understandings, reactions and symbolic meanings rooted in their social relations that are consciously or unconsciously structured (Geetz, 1983), I needed a guided semi-structured interview to achieve my goals. They also provided a means to manage the duration of the interviews.

Interviews, that were audio-recorded, were aimed at collecting narratives in the form of data about a set of themes that centred on pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities. In the first place, I set out to gather the background information about supervisor experiences during their time as doctoral students themselves and doctoral student experiences at the master's level. I was keen on identifying the nature of supervisor interaction with students as modes of supervision and levels of doctoral students who undertake graduate studies and finally, the expectations of the supervisor of their students and

student expectations of the doctoral experience. My interest directed me to the role of departments, disciplines, and contextual issues and how they impact on doctoral supervision. I was also interested in assets and other resources that supervisors use as a benchmark as they supervise their students and how they learn to supervise. The interview protocol also explored supervisor views about staff development programmes, the reasons for the low production of South Africans at the PhD level and how doctoral supervision can be improved in South Africa.

The student interview protocol sought to corroborate supervisor responses to some of the items that they raised and to help in building the context, practice, and purpose of doctoral supervision. In this case, I purposed to gather data about student's initial experiences where they graduated at master's level, admission requirements at PhD level, their expectations of learning at the master's level as well as their pedagogical experiences under their supervisors. Furthermore, the protocol investigated student experiences within their disciplinary areas and departments. At the end of the interview, it was necessary to find out how they envisioned an improvement in PhD supervision.

As noted earlier, interviews were not just about the people and the topics that I had tailored my interviews on, but also the physical appearance and reactions of the people I interviewed as well as the context of the interview. As such, the next section relates to observations, as a method used to gather physical data related to situations, people's appearances, places, and other events.

4.7.4 Observations and field notes

To understand the pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities, I employed observation as a research method. Observation is a methodical process of recording behavioural data from people, or characteristics of things, situations, places, and other events as they happen. It is "a process of gathering open-ended first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site" (Creswell, 2002, p.211). As a technique, it utilises human sight to gather physical and expressive forms of data. The literature on forms of observation has grown in the recent past, with ethnographic researchers outlining participant and non-participant observation (unobtrusive) as the two main types of collecting primary data. I adopted the non-participant observation method to collect data from both supervisors and students in my study. I did not literally observe the "private space" of supervision but rather, I observed the participants' non-verbal cues of communication and the context within which the interviews were actualised. Silverman (1993) states that "we have all become a little reluctant to use our eyes as well as our ears during observational work" (p.72). This qualitative technique, inspired by Silverman, motivated me to engage in unstructured observation as opposed to structured observation so that I could conduct my research in a comprehensive untethered manner. Using this method, I collected non-verbal data that articulated itself in what Onwuegbuzie, Leech and Collins (2010) describe as either proxemics (the interpersonal distance that allows for communication of attitudes, feelings etc.), chronemic- (use of pacing speech and length of silence in speech), Kinetic (body movement and posture) and paralinguistic – (variations in pitch, tone and quality of voice) to collect both observable data and less on the spoken word. This data was useful in supporting the feelings, views, and opinions of the participants during the data interpretation stage.

Unstructured observation allows the researcher to enter the field or context of observation with no predetermined notions as to the discrete behaviours that they might observe (Mulhall, 2003, p.307). In my study, I interviewed doctoral supervisors and their students mainly in offices, a relaxed space conducive for the data I was accessing. This was contrary to the structured observations which, Mulhall (2003) alleges, distances the researcher from the context, making it more of an objective encounter, typical of positivistic rather than the unstructured observation that is more interpretivist.

Qualitative research states that observation is a method of collecting data that would not only be used to locate the researchers in their contexts but also provide insight into the themes that are centred on the practice of supervision. I was influenced by Neuman's (1997) writings that suggest that researchers should not ignore the physical environment, people, their race, gender, height, age, physical appearance, nonverbal communication and the peoples' general movements in each space (Eichler, 1988). Accordingly, at the onset of the interviews, I conducted, I was conscious about the real physical environment that the participant occupied, who they were and the general appearances in their offices. Finally, some artefacts in some of the context of the interview, which carried some vital information about my topic, became part of the things that I observed.

The observations were recorded in the form of field notes. Field notes are texts of any kind that are written or recorded by a field researcher as he/she makes observations while in the field (Creswell, 2002). I opted to take on the role of a non-participant observer because it suited my study, and I engaged in two activities concurrently: writing and observing. I listened and looked at the participant and areas around him/her as I took notes on the

impressions and expression they exhibited. My interviews were scheduled to last for about an hour for the supervisors and thirty-five minutes for the students.

4.8 Ethical considerations and practices

Prior to my field research, I submitted my proposal to the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Johannesburg for approval. This move was aimed at safeguarding any potential harm to the doctoral programmes, practices and all participants' rights and freedoms, confidentiality, deception, and beneficiaries of the programmes (Creswell, 2013). This step was mandated as it necessitated the processes of collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of the findings and most of all it included human subjects. I was then granted a clearance certificate which served to ensure that I had complied with the principles of honesty, confidentiality, truth, ethics and respect for knowledge, human life, and democratic principles in my study.

The current study would be harmful to the participants in various ways. The doctoral students expressed fears of supervisor reaction if their identities were disclosed. For such fears, I assured them of the confidential nature of the interview. The study was designed in such a way that institutional programmes that supervisors engaged in with doctoral students would ensure that they would not be harmed in any way. To avert this challenge, I obtained the research approval from the Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg. The participants were doctoral supervisors and their students, and it was thought that they would perhaps be emotionally tense during the interview. In cases where the interviews would turn personal to the extent of invoking personal issues (Allmark *et al.,* 2009), I assured the participant that such issues would remain confidential (Creswell, 2002**)** or would be handled as per their wishes. In some cases, female participants turned emotional and discussed painful

challenges that they were experiencing during the supervision process. This according to Allmark *et al.* (2009) was therapeutic. However, in cases where the interview was destined to affect the participants psychologically, I offered to discontinue the interview. Finally, I was aware that participants in my study would be vulnerable in one way or another, depending on what they were doing in terms of supervision at that time. As such, participants may be stressed or disturbed when discussing issues to do with research supervision. As stated earlier, participants who reached this level during the interview would be encouraged to discontinue with the interview (Arifin, 2018).

Whenever I interacted with the interviewees, specifically, before the interview, I displayed the ethics document to ensure transparency. An invitation letter that detailed the focus of my study, its purpose, and the important role the participants would play in informing the study were included as well. The letter also indicated that participants were at liberty to withdraw from the study at their own discretion. Participants were then required to sign a specially prepared consent form as proof that they had voluntarily agreed to be part of the study. To confirm that the participants understood the value and risk-free nature of the study, and accepted to participate, below is one of the emails from one of the respondents: '*I will be delighted to take part in your research as an interviewee*' (24th, October, 2013); *'I am willing to talk to you on 28, October, 2013'*(Famous). On grounds of confidentiality and adherence to research ethical practices, the names and any reference made to the participants in the thesis are fictitious and therefore do not directly depict or implicate or directly reveal the identity of the participants (Babbie, 2001**).** Similarly, the field notes and audio recordings that formed a large part of the data are secured by the researcher.

4.9 Field experiences

The field experience was a practical process that involved ethical, strategic, and personal issues (Creswell, 2002**)** that needed serious consideration. I strategically organised my schedule for data collection based on the availability of the participants. The data collection process started in October 2013 and ended in March 2015. The first stage of data collection with supervisors started in October 2013 and ended in March 2014. From March 2014 to October 2014, I collected data from doctoral students, with interviews and observations being conducted synchronously. Most of the interviews took place during the day, between 06:50 and 20:30. The entire experience is described as follows.

During the interviews, I implemented a pattern that I followed consistently. Given that most of the interviews and observations were conducted in offices, the first thing I always did was to ensure that I was at the interview venue on time. On meeting the interviewees, I greeted them, introduced myself and as a matter of routine, reminded them of how appreciative I was on their participation. As much as I adopted this approach, I learnt that data collection through interviews was both challenging but interesting. Challenging and puzzling because participants would outrightly warn me not to prepare interviews that lasted for more than thirty-five minutes, yet they had agreed to participate in an hours' interview. Other participants, even after having prior knowledge of the interview protocol, pressured me to skip the preliminary formalities and requested me to get to the interview instantly. For instance, one participant said, *"Let's begin now, you know I have a meeting at one…no formalities"* (Famous). This reaction intensified what Spradley (1979) and Briggs (1986) refer to as apprehension that is characteristic of strangers when they meet for the first time. It also contradicts the view that "the powerful are aware of what academic research involves, and are familiar with being interviewed" (Kogan, 1994, p.225). I prepared the recording device, my

notebook, and other resources essential for the exercise. This reaction is reminiscent of Neuman (1997) assertion that "powerful elites can block access" (p. 376) or the view that "those at or near the top have the right to define the way things are going to be" (p. 377). At times, I felt intimidated by the subliminal messages present at the interview.

I was also startled by the inexplicable reactions that characterised other interview sessions. Even though all the participants had agreed to participate in the study, 80% of the student participants cautioned me never to disclose to their supervisors whatever had transpired in the interview. One doctoral student, SPh3 laughingly remarked, '*I hope this interview discussions will not reach my supervisor. My supervisor cautioned me against participating in your interview because you are studying them!*' Yet another student SPh4 who had almost completed the PhD programme, on three occasions in the interview kept reminding me not to include some information they had disclosed for confidentiality purposes. SPh2 and 3 also expressed similar views. While I was conscious of the challenges of interviewing "the elite powerful" (Neuman, 1994) a common theme that emerged from my data was the omnipresent fear that enveloped the introduction part of the interview which also impacted me negatively. I also engulfed with fear; the fear was contagious, first as a junior researcher and secondly as a doctoral student under a supervisor. These reactions exposed the researcher to the difficulties of "researching the researcher" in the book: *Emotionally Involved: The Impact of Researching Rape* (Campbell, 2002). At the same time, I learnt that for me the (researcher) and the participants (doctoral supervisors and students), the topic on supervision was "a sensitive topic" "that required a clear assessment on the impact of the research on both the participant" and (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007, p. 327-353) myself as the researcher.

The interview venues were conducive for recording and writing notes and I was able to collect data using multiple methods and this method is supported by Boeije (2010), who states that empirical data are stories told by participants, quotes, observations by the researcher, and any other information that satisfies the needs of a research question. I observed and participated (Yin, 1994) in the interview dialogue. This approach consumed less time and enabled me to capture data by "blending the strength of one type of method [the interview] and neutralizing the weakness of the other [observation] (Creswell, 2002). Essentially, observation of behaviour and the context play a critical role in clarifying what the interview and the available documents provided.

4.10 Data storage

Interviews were recorded. Bryman (2004) observes that audio-recording in qualitative studies is important because researchers are interested not only in what the participants say, but also how they say it. The recording was also helpful in giving me time to seek clarification on inconsistencies on the part of the respondent, follow interesting points, make prompts and probe further. A voice recorder was used to capture the data after seeking permission from participants. Following Creswell (2009) and Bryman (2004) advice that the recording device can fail, I did a parallel handwritten record of the proceedings of the interview.

However, some of the gadgets that I used to store data were vulnerable as some them crashed while others were corrupted making me to lose some valuable data. A memory stick that I had used to record one of the interviews crashed and therefore could not open. Another recording was partly corrupted by a virus, making it difficult for me to transcribe its interview

contents. But still, the data collected and saved led to the next stage of data management and analysis.

4.11 Management and analysis data

Since qualitative data in the current study was mainly interviews, observation guides and field notes, I analysed the data using the framework data analysis approach (Baptiste, 2001). In this approach, data from interviews is transcribed as the researcher moves from the collected qualitative data into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of (Smith, & Firth, 2011) the participants' views on doctoral supervision. This leads to "inductive coding [which] begins with close readings of text and consideration of the multiple meanings that are inherent in the text." (Thomas, 2003, p. 4). This process identifies aspects of the transcripts that are relevant and are conveniently located to related to the understanding or interpretation in the a given description. Accordingly, the framework approach is particularly suited to the analysis of doctoral supervision because it allows for the description of "data enabling different aspects of the phenomena under investigation to be captured" (Smith, & Firth, 2011, p.4). Apparently, Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, (2013) acknowledge that the to and from movements allow the researcher to come up with a coherent account of the phenomenon under investigation.

Thus, this study involved managing (preparing data for analysis) and applying the coding practices to simplify and enhance data description, reducing the mass of data and subjecting it to critical examination and an extraction of deeper and different forms/types of interpretation and meaning prior to presentation of the analysed data, side by side with direct quotes from the participants (Miles, Huberman, & Huberman, 1994). I was engaged in "a process that involved making sense out of text, and image data" (Creswell, 2009, p.183). This

is an information management process that involves arranging and setting the data for different levels of analysis and getting deeper into it for clear representation, interpretation and understanding of its meaning in relation to the key questions addressed by the study. Since case studies generate qualitative data, data collection and analysis were concurrently carried out (Merriam, 2002). The identification of gaps in this study were characterised by critically reading, analysing, and evaluating available literature and documents concurrently. This exercise provided an avenue for a synchronised collection and analysis of empirical data. For instance, the first item in the interview protocol sought to elicit responses from supervisors about their own experiences as PhD students under supervision. Surprisingly, the first two participants had this to say:

> Charisma: *You know for me to reflect on something that happened many, many years ago is quite difficult.*
>
> Gurus: *Oh, this is years ago, ... I cannot remember much, you know.*

These reactions motivated me to carefully analyse and reflect on each interview before I embarked on interviewing another participant. I also learnt that the flow of an interview and the framing of the questions was mainly a function of the context and the extent to which each participant was hooked into the encounter. Essentially, the bits of field notes collected during the observation process and the tape-recorded interviews formed the basis of data analysis. Each recorded interview was slowly and carefully transcribed to enhance effective and focused analysis.

In practice, the process of data analysis was intimidating, as observed by Babbie and Mouton (2001). Transcription of data was time-consuming and involved several repeated listening to each of the participants' voices before I could assign any meaning to the collected data. Based on this data, I focused on each individual case, as suggested by Eisenhardt (1989) and read the transcript repeatedly to isolate and ascertain the dominant themes. This reflected what Miles and Huberman (1994) observe that a cross-case analysis involves reading and reflecting on data to determine the emerging patterns that characterise different cases under investigation. Concentrating on the interviews case by case familiarised me with the data and set the stage for the subsequent analysis and interpretation process. The interview sessions were recreated in the form of flashbacks which helped to interpret what I had read; the field notes I had taken blended well with what I had recorded in the field. Analysing and understanding each of the cases resulted in specific variables that needed attention. With this realisation, I looked at similar themes across the cases in what Miles and Huberman (ibid.) refer to as variable-oriented analysis.

I utilised Strauss and Corbin's (1990) method of open coding, axial and selective coding – a means of moving from massive data to more specific themes that are more abstract but meaningful in representing and describing the collected data. The initial codes at the open coding stage were long and at times confusing. Each time I revisited them, I kept modifying them, tending towards a more refined set of codes (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2007). This experience represented the height of axial and selective coding because at times, I failed to realise whenever I moved back to axial coding and came back to selective coding, the process was extremely taxing. Figure 4.2 outlines the process of data interpretation.

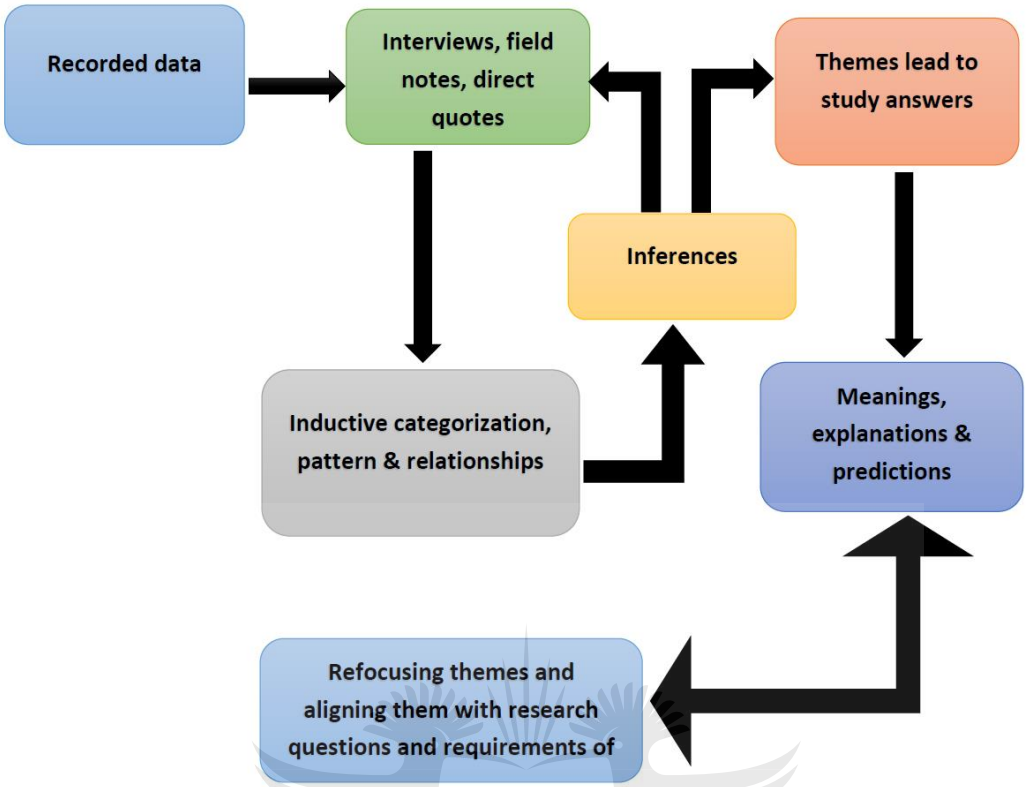

Figure 4.2: The process of data interpretation

Source: created by the author

The most challenging and interesting aspect of data analysis and interpretation was that some cases gave detailed personal experiences that led to new interpretations and understandings that required me to refresh the literature to accommodate the new data. Given my observations, the physical appearance, and the ease with which some of the participants engaged, these revelations mirrored the value of experience in doctoral pedagogies in South Africa. This was instrumental and appropriate in gaining "an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 18-19). Even with such challenges and movements, I needed to establish the validity and reliability of my study.

4.12 Establishing validity and Reliability of the study

Validity in qualitative research has remained an elusive concept according to Babbie (2013). I invoked "good craftsmanship in [my] investigation" as suggested by Kvale (2002) by "checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings" (p.309). In every stage of the research process, I constantly consulted with my supervisor, peers, and other members of the academic staff to enhance validity. Guided by Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2007), I validated the data by checking for bias, neglect and for lack of precision. I also realised that, as spelt out in the ethics section, it would be unacceptable to publish information collected from participants without sending the transcript and parts of the quotations back to them for validation and affirmation. I sent the refined transcripts to the participants for cross-checking to establish whether the themes and codes presented were as accurate as they described/expressed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, multiple methods of data collection were employed as a means of data triangulation that enhanced the convergence of the collected data. Since my study was concerned with the engagement of supervisors in the South African context, the inclusion of doctoral students was a further measure of the validity of the study from supervisors' responses. For instance, I raised questions on the role of departments in doctoral supervision, and both students and supervisors responded. In addition, I also reviewed a document prepared by the department of education highlighting the role of supervisors and students. Other tools of research included academic discipline, financial support, and challenges of doctoral supervision.

Apart from utilising a range of methods and participants and doing member checks to establish internal reliability (White, 2006), I provided a detailed description of the subject under investigation, the roles of participants and the context within which they operated, as

suggested by Creswell (2002). For example, it was important to provide a clear description of a supervisor and a student and their engagement in supervisory relationships.

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter presented designs, and methodological choices made during the study. It explained the epistemological basis that guided the entire study, the research approach, design, methods of data collection, and analysis as well as field experiences during the research process. The chapter also discussed the suitability of methodological choices and why they were considered appropriate for the study.

It argued that although a good research plan is developed and justified at the onset, the reality in the field occasionally has to be rearranged to what was initially planned, that is a research plan is not linear and unpredictability is inevitable. This was evident in the way data was collected because at times introductions were glossed over and the duration of the interviews were shortened, as requested by some supervisors. This happened despite the impression made by the chapter that understanding a process is procedural and therefore the necessary steps for understanding should be followed in every step. In addition, the procedures taken to establish ethical considerations were discussed. While this chapter focused on the modes of inquiry in doctoral supervision in two institutions of higher education in South Africa, the doctoral supervisors engage with PhD students in an environment that needs to be understood prior to the real data analysis. The next chapter describes the context of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

Doctoral supervision in South African universities: contextual realities

5.1 Introduction

Many studies on doctoral supervision have not really focused on the context and impact on doctoral supervision. Studies on doctoral supervision have technically dealt with and addressed issues of meaning, student supervisor-relationships, models/approaches to supervision, and some sets of criteria that should govern pedagogical practices at doctoral level. These issues are discussed with the assumption that the contexts within which all universities operate are similar. Doctoral education plays a critical role in socio-economic development and contributes to existing knowledge (Kehm, 2006). This *technist* approach does not explain why some universities produce more PhDs than others in a single year or why some countries with similar economic background/rating vary in terms of PhD production. The basis for making comparisons about rate of PhD production is based on statistics, leaving out the more pertinent contextual experiences of supervisors.

This chapter demonstrates doctoral supervision as a process that is informed and affected by diverse tangible and intangible contextual factors unique to a country, a university, a faculty, an individual supervisor, and doctoral student. It therefore seeks to answer two closely related questions: *What constitutes the context of doctoral supervision in South African universities? How does this environment influence doctoral supervision in South Africa?* By discussing the possible contextual factors, the chapter sets a platform for understanding the complex web of intersecting interventions that navigate PhD supervisors'

supervision encounters, leaving them as either victors, victims or villains. I argue that the current context of doctoral supervision has fundamental effects on choices that doctoral supervisors make during the supervision process.

5.2 Conceptual framework: field as a social space for doctoral supervisors

The concept of field, as advanced by Bourdieu (1986), is instrumental in discussing the context of doctoral supervision. As a useful tool for explication of contextual issues, Bourdieu points out:

> In order to understand interactions between people, or to explain an event or social phenomenon, it [is] insufficient to look at what was said, or what happened. It [is] necessary to examine the *social space* in which interactions, transactions and events occurred……. [Such an] analysis of social space [does not only mean] *locating* the object of investigation in its specific historical and local/nationally, international, and relational context, but also interrogating …. whose interests were served by those knowledge generation practices (Thomson, 2008, p. 67).

The concept shows how university education is structured in post-apartheid South Africa at one level. I also use it to explore different structures in doctoral education such as the entire university, faculties, departments, disciplines, and other global factors as crucial social spaces that determine the process of supervision. I take on this venture with the understanding of the inherent competition in the field (Bourdieu, 1986) of doctoral supervision as a manifestation of a more profound power struggle between doctoral students and their supervisors who dominate them [or feel dominated]. This happens in situations that have over time established "constant, permanent relationships of inequality [that] operate in [the space of doctoral supervision], which at the same time becomes a space in which some [supervisors] struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field [discipline]"

(Bourdieu, 1998, p.40-41). Within the matrix of doctoral supervision, there are forces that define supervisor-student interactions, but more significantly a *social spac*e where knowledge, policies and practices, politics of governance, the university environment and the Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), staff and students all converge. This space also includes invisible environments such as knowledge economy and quality assurance, documents, and supervision practices as well as the world external to the university which is society, government, and other local and global universities.

I also draw on the intersecting contexts cited by Backhouse (2009) as a way of giving credence to the other concepts by Bourdieu (1986) and widening the scope of the doctoral supervisor/student context. Thoughtful reference is made to these concepts in relation to supervisor knowledge, skills, and abilities to generate and maintain social networks to cope with certain situations in the field. The ability to interact within a certain environment repeatedly, according to this author, constitutes a context which should be examined in relation to doctoral supervision. For instance, transformation in many aspects of life in South Africa affects the whole country. In this regard, habitus is useful in partial explanation and understanding of institutional, departmental, and disciplinary contexts as reflected in their organised and routinised manner excluding interests and modes of operation (Kemp, 2010). In other words, institutional habits and dispositions imbibed from the environment over time are fundamentally important to understanding how PhD supervisors succeed (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). In this perspective universities, departments, social groups, and the disciplines, as constituted over time, are a 'way of life' comprised of dispositions, beliefs and practices that facilitate their existence and operation. In my research, operations within and out of the university with respect to supervision of doctoral students are conceptualised as the

'lives of this institution' and therefore harbouring the beliefs and dispositions that influence doctoral supervision.

However, the foregoing concepts do not wholly explain the supervision dynamics prevalent among different supervisors and their chances of attaining success in certain environments. I therefore deploy the concept of cultural capital as the pivotal idea that links supervision and context of operation. In this chapter, the concept of cultural capital is used on the postulation that certain dispositions and habits inherited from the family are fundamentally important to successful PhD supervision (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). As discussed in Chapter three, cultural capital exists in three different forms and consists of any knowledge, experience or connections that enable people to succeed further than those who have a different set of those resources (Bourdieu, 1986).

To start detaching the contextual layers that camouflage the contested field of doctoral supervisors, I discuss the restructured universities in post-apartheid South Africa in section 5.3. It is followed in section 5.4 and subsequent sections by some of the major contextual issues that have a bearing on doctoral supervision, before concluding the chapter.

5.3 Background: restructured universities and transformation

This study focused on a faculty and a school of education in two universities with emphasis on the context of doctoral supervision in South Africa. With respect to this study is the general transformation that has been taking place for the last two and a half decades. Transformation for South Africa's higher education has been propelled by both local and global forces (Cloete, 2006). On the local scene, South Africa, has been confronted with the challenge of addressing past legacies of inequality perpetrated by the apartheid government

and policies by expanding higher education to include those that were formerly disadvantaged (Herman, 2011) as it deals with the challenges of change. This form of affirmative action turned out to be the most critical consideration in the drive to restructure university education. Suffice to say, issues of redress, racial representation, equity, democratic governance and restructuring of higher institutions have dominated the discourse of higher education in South Africa (CHE, 2009).

In this study, I discuss briefly the nature of institutions of higher learning and how they were designed to cater for the ideals of apartheid and how the post-1994 regime endeavoured to restructure institutions to meet the needs of a new democratic South Africa. It also endeavoured to illustrate how the new restructured institutional environment could affect teaching and learning. The period between 1910 and 1948, and even after 1956 the Bantu Education Act introduced was to the advantage of the white community but to the detriment of other races (Reddy, 2004). The environment and policies formed by the racial government ensured that PhD supervisors were racially segregated, and this ensured the preservation of white supremacy, with postgraduate studies dominated by white supervisors creating no space for the development of black PhD supervisors (Robinson, 1996).

Secondly, the political and ideological fragmentation structured by racial segregation (Bunting, 2006) was also accompanied by epistemological fragmentation. Historically Black Universities (HBUs) were dominated by white supervisors who acted as custodians of Christian nationalist ideology entrenched in the philosophy of fundamental bigoted pedagogics. They were marked by “running battles between students and police, mass meetings, demonstrations, boycotts, passionate debates between students of different ideological camps, teargas infested lecture rooms – all expressive manifestations of student

political struggle on the black and some white campuses" (Reddy, 2004, p.5). During this time, access to universities by other races was severely curtailed. Societal inequalities were reflected in the systemic discrimination in higher education which had racial, gender, institutional and class underpinnings at the legislative level this legacy continues to shape the current educational practices in higher education (Badat, 2010; Bunting, 2006; DoE, 1997). In practice, there were Historically White Universities (HWU) and Historically Black Universities (HBU). These divisions deepened, assuming higher levels of importance depending on the extent to which they served the interests of the apartheid government (Bunting, 2006). Bunting points out that:

> some universities in the groupings supported the National Party, including its apartheid higher education policies…. And were instrumentalist institutions which were governed in cruel authoritative ways… and their core business [was] dissemination and generation of knowledge for a purpose defined or determined by a socio-political agenda (p.9).

This supportive role of the university justifies the context and role of higher education in the society and how political and social-economic aspects of life shapes the learning environment. Thus, infiltration of political ideology into universities severely affected the nature, ability, and quality of knowledge production at postgraduate level (Jansen, 1991). This is better captured by Pillay and Karlsson (2013):

> Using Foucault's theory of power, Jansen explain[ed] how academics from historically white universities had power in South Africa during the apartheid era, and therefore had the means with which to produce knowledge. As a result, the corpus of knowledge produced through research in South African universities before the 1990s was the product of those put in positions of power by the apartheid system. The ... era was designed by white interests to preserve and entrench the segregated, hierarchical racial order that put white people in superior decision-making positions in society (p. 4).

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In universities that subscribed to government policies:

> [There was] lack of critical discourse in the disciplines as well as in more public spheres with respect to pressing social and *human problems*. There [was also] a pervasive and narrow problem-solving, applications-based pedagogy and research, but not much of a standing back and posing of critical questions to understand, probe, disrupt official policy or standard practice (Ibid, p.4).

Such observation shows that the context within which a university exists can lead to indoctrination, authoritarianism, and the culture of obedience not only on policy practices in the institution, which determine what is taught and how it is taught, but also the pedagogical practices, the direction, management, nature, and quality of knowledge they produce and most importantly, utilise knowledge as a useful tool for power dynamics in an organisation.

5.4 Post-Independence: repairing the damage

The post-1994 policies focused mainly on addressing previous educational imbalances in South Africa, issues of equity, access, democracy, redress, and efficiency were addressed in the White Paper 3 on higher education (Elliott, 2004). This was a political-driven agenda

(Hall, Symes & Luescher, 2004) perceived as obligatory by the government to provide access and quality higher education for all South Africans.

There were a few reforms in higher education that affected the context of education. Reforms that were undertaken during this time were the institutional mergers **(**Reddy, 2006**).** Although the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) referred to the possibility of institutional mergers in 2001, the report by National Working Group, *The Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa,* recommended the reduction of universities from 36 to 21 and recommended that specific institutions would be merged in various provinces (Jansen, 2002**).**

As part of the implementation of the merger process, the former 36 universities and technikons were reformatted to 23 institutions of learning – that is, traditional Universities, Comprehensive Universities and Universities of Technology (ASSAF, 2010; CHE, 2009,). Traditional universities were those that had either merged with other institutions or remained the same while comprehensive universities were those that merged with a technikon (Hall, Symes & Luescher, 2004), while the present Universities of Technology were products of mergers between two or more technikons. Operations in these universities were to be based on the nature of programmes that they were designed to offer. The DoE (2001, p.49) reported that universities would "offer career-oriented degrees and professional programmes, general formative programmes and research, masters and doctoral programmes", while comprehensive universities would offer a range of programmes including diplomas and research-oriented degrees (CHE, 2009). Vocational, technical degrees and diplomas (sub-degrees) are offered by universities of technology (Reddy, 2000). While restructuring the education process, the issues of racial discrimination, access, and redress, were radically

addressed. However, the effect has been an upsurge of the number of students, leading to an imbalance in staff with supervisor-student ratio substantially increasing (ASSAF, 2010; Mouton, 2007). The PhD supervisor-student ratio in South Africa has increased from 1.3 students per supervisor to 1.9 between the years 2000 and 2007 (ASSAF, 2010). Not much research has been done to measure the possible impact restructured institutions have had on the context of teaching and the way supervisors engage in doctoral supervision. It is likely that the restructured universities and the programmes offered dictate the pedagogical approaches in which lecturers engage. For instance, the fact that some universities are research oriented while others are not, is likely to influence supervisor mind-set, performativity, orientation, and what is expected of them.

Even though this was a step in the right direction, available literature does not suggest how involved university lecturers (PhD supervisors) were prepared to execute their duties in a restructured environment. In addition, the massification of higher education in the post-1994 period was not accompanied by significant efforts towards resource expansion (academic staff) and development (Hornsby, & Osman, 2014; Jansen, 2003) in the previously disadvantaged universities.

Post 1994, with employment equity, legislation as stated in higher education policies, the number of senior black staff capable of supervising doctoral students remains limited in some institutions of higher learning. For instance, education policies of post-1994 demonstrated a tension between the local imperative of equity (Herman, 2011) particularly about PhD holders who were deployed in formerly disadvantaged higher institutions of learning. My question is, how were they themselves ‘restructured or transformed’ to midwife

the transition in as far as modes of delivery and learning/teaching methods **(**Badat, 2005) of graduate students were concerned?

Then, constraints such as the quality of students, exiting a dysfunctional school system (ASSAF, 2010) affect the context of doctoral supervision. For instance, students moving through high school and getting into postgraduate studies reflect the defects that remain endemic within the education system. Besides, the environmental conditions for postgraduate studies vary considerably depending on whether students are enrolled on a full-time or part-time basis. ASSAF (ibid) notes that "doctoral students experience work commitments, problems with access to facilities and resources…. and issues with supervision … family or work commitments seem to weigh more heavily" leading to challenges in teaching and learning at doctoral level.

However, critical to the post-apartheid higher education restructured context, as outlined by the Ministry of Education 1997 White Paper: *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education,* was for higher education institutions to ensure that South Africa achieves "political democratization, economic reconstruction, development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity" (DoE, 1997, p.5). This was reflected in the following aims:

a) To address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge driven and knowledge dependent society, with the ever-changing high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy.
b) To contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible, and constructively critical citizens. Higher education encourages the development of a reflective capacity

and a willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas, policies, and practices based on a commitment to the common good.

c) To contribute to the creation and evaluation of knowledge. Higher education engages in the pursuit of academic scholarship and intellectual inquiry in all fields of human understanding, through research, learning, teaching (ibid, p.5).

Universities were expected to follow these resolutions as spelt out in the paper, but at the same time juggle with the dilemma of pursuing the political (democratisation and redistribution) dimeson of the government. Given that some universities during the apartheid era supported the National Party's agenda, the post-1994 agenda seemed to be making demands on universities, thus setting the environment for contestations between the government and university.

Even though policy makers in the South African context turned attention to this level of education, the National Research Foundation (NRF) gave doctoral education a major role to play in economic development (NRF, 2007), although not all universities were currently contributing equally to the call to increase the number of doctorates (PhDs) in South Africa. The context was different. A cluster of nine institutions of higher learning, comprised of both universities and comprehensive universities produced 80% of the PhDs in South Africa by 2007 (ASSAF, 2010). Thus, classification of universities, as done in South Africa, provides an environment that encourages supervisors to engage less in postgraduate supervision. In the next section, I focus on the university context and the participating university faculties.

5.5 Institutional context: university faculties

In the selected universities, doctoral supervision takes place within the university context. This context, in ideal global parameters is characterised by highly talented staff and students, adequate resources for learning and research environment, "favourable governance allowing and encouraging autonomy, strategic vision, innovation, efficient resource supervision, and flexibility" (The Russell Group of Universities, 2012, p.4). These features characterise the focus, role, and place of postgraduate studies in higher institutions of learning.

In this context, faculties organise internal financial support for doctoral students through assistantships and Supervisor Linked Funds (SLF) or merit awards, which according to the Association of American Universities (AAU, 1998), help students work towards completion of their degrees. Such practices prevail in South African Universities where doctoral students are employed in their departments on a part time basis (ASSAF, 2010). Education faculties also offer conducive learning environments to both students and supervisors which provide essential rigor for research, conference attendance and publication of research. In the South African context, restricted access to facilities and little interaction with peers have been cited as impacting negatively on doctoral education (ibid). This could negatively affect the spirit and the motivation for the training and development of high-quality researchers.

Doctoral supervision in the context of South Africa universities is characterised by many issues. Mouton (2007**)** points out that most of the experienced supervisors aged over 50 "assume disproportionate supervisory loads" (p.1079) and secondly, "the increasing internationalization and even institutionalization of corporatism and managerialism in South

African universities, has brought with it a concomitant shift in attention from concerns of quality and effectiveness to concerns about efficiency and throughput". Mouton reports that while the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) focused more attention on quality management systems and procedures, supervision, and support offered to postgraduate students (p.1079), universities were responding to the realities of unequal racial representation at all levels of education. However, Backhouse (2009) reports that almost 15 years after the advent of democracy, the majority holders of doctorate degrees and employees in universities were still white South Africans. Black students had limited or no mentors and therefore were not motivated to pursue doctoral education (CHE, 2010). This factor is highly contentious about how supervisors ensure that many formerly disadvantaged students succeed in their PhDs and maintain the standards of the institutions. In addition, the assumption is that availability of black role models as supervisors will automatically influence undergraduates to pursue postgraduate studies seems to be misplaced.

There are many more reasons in this context that motivate people to enrol for PhDs. Whether white professors may serve as role models or not, stories and experiences of black students who have gone through or dropped out of a doctoral programme may demotivate prospective black students from enrolling for a PhD. The context of supervision has been compounded by increased numbers of students who drop out citing "inexperienced/neglectful supervisors as among the reasons for their failure to complete their degree" and the increasing pressure from both the state and universities to produce more PhDs (Van Zyl, 2011, p.75). How universities approach this issue will simultaneously influence how PhD students are supervised.

As pointed out in Chapter four, this study focused on faculty and school of education in two universities in South Africa. I describe briefly specific of aspect of these universities and the respective faculty and school of education.

5.5.1 The University of Johannesburg, Faculty of Education: doctoral education as an emerging field

University of Johannesburg (UJ), established in 2005 from the merging of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), the Witwatersrand Technikon, and the Soweto and East Rand campuses of Vista University, is now one of the comprehensive universities in South Africa (University of Johannesburg, 2011**)** made up of four campuses: Auckland Park Kingsway, Auckland Park Bunting Road, Doornfontein and the Soweto Campuses. The university is made up of nine faculties, offering a blend of programmes in vocational, professional, and general formative training, which run vertically from undergraduate, certificate programmes to doctoral programmes (CHE, 2010). Located in the city of Johannesburg, UJ admits both local and international students and utilises both local and international talent by hiring staff both locally and globally (University of Johannesburg, 2013; CHE, 2010).

Supervisors at the PhD level operate in a research-rich environment. The UJ Vice-Chancellor, in the 2013 annual report, pointed out that there was a high level of research activity as measured by the output with a steady increase in number of researchers, as well as a critical mass of postdoctoral fellows, who form an important element of sustainable research in the university (University of Johannesburg, 2011).

The Faculty of Education is one of the nine faculties at UJ. For effective administration of academic programmes, the Faculty runs five departments, namely

Educational Psychology, Education and Curriculum Studies, Childhood Education, Educational Leadership and Management, and the Department of Science and Technology Education (University of Johannesburg, 2015). Based on the research areas or topics listed in the 2015 brochure found on the Faculty's website, all these departments offer doctoral programmes (ibid.). In the recent years, there has been a significant increase in research production, with faculty reaching 62.65 units in 2015, an increase from 54.75% in 2011, which are drawn from articles in accredited journals, research-based books and conference proceedings (University of Johannesburg, 2013). The 2013 research report indicates that the Faculty has been experiencing a steady growth in research output since 2009. Consequently, the Faculty in the past few years has become a robust research section. However, what is conspicuously missing in the 2011, 2013 and 2014 annual research reports are data on place and role of doctoral students in research and frequency of throughput in the Faculty. The 2013 Annual Report indicates that the Faculty of Education had an enrolment of 3,515 students of which 848 were postgraduates (University of Johannesburg, 2013). Serving both undergraduate and postgraduate student are 57 members of staff, of which, 77% are holders of doctoral qualifications (University of Johannesburg, 2013).

While UJ is hailed for its successes in higher learning, there have been some major setbacks. For instance, according to CHE (2010), the Audit Report identified several challenges such as the

(i) Inability to attract and retain black academics,

(ii) Recruitment and hiring of people "who lack sufficient seniority for their functions" (p. 30),

(iii) Poor quality of teaching and learning, and

(iv) “Lack of genuine integration of foreign African students into UJ’s student life” (p.14).

While the Faculty has been strategic in addressing challenges faced by undergraduate students in the context of teaching and learning, learning resources, tutorials, technological mediation, and so on, a vacuum still prevails at the level of postgraduate studies particularly in creating a conducive environment that provides students with solid epistemological, theoretical, methodological and contextual grounding in their studies. These challenges can have an impact on how supervisors interact with doctoral students on campus. Additionally, in cases where less qualified people are made to lead a department this can greatly impact on levels of research at the department.

5.5.2 The University of the Witwatersrand, Wits School of Education: A research-intensive environment

The University of the Witwatersrand is a historically White, English language medium university located in the city of Johannesburg, South Africa. According to the 2013 Annual Report, the university academic element is made up of five faculties. This includes faculties of Commerce, Law and Management, Engineering and the Built Environment, Health Sciences, Humanities and Science (University of the Witwatersrand, 2014). The report further notes that the university has 34 schools offering over 3,000 courses, 3,900 academic staff members serving 30,000 students of which 70% are black and 33% are postgraduates and over 3,200 international students come from more than 96 countries.

The Wits School of Education (WSoE), which forms part of the setting of my study, is one of the five schools in the Faculty of Humanities. Formerly called Johannesburg College of

Education (JCE), WSoE has a long history, dating back to its establishment in 1909 (Sehoole, 2002). However, with the democratisation of South Africa and the continued transformation in the higher education sector, Sehoole observes that JCE was incorporated in the University of the Witwatersrand as the result of a signed memorandum understanding in January 2001. The school's success is anchored in smaller administrative units called divisions. On its website, WSoE lists Curriculum, Arts Education, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Foundation Phase, Educational Information and Technology, Language, Literacy and Literature, Mathematics Education, Science and Technology and Social and Economic Sciences divisions as the main academic administrative units of the school (http://www.wits.ac.za/academic/humanities/ education/7950/staff.html.). All these divisions offer postgraduate programmes at honours, master's, and doctoral levels.

Amid challenges that have over the years marked the merger process, WSoE has become an important centre for teacher education and postgraduate studies. As a leading research-led professional school, the Wits 2013 annual report points out that the School was awarded a prize for being the most "enabling institutional environment for educational research in Africa in 2011-2012, a project under the Korea Trust Fund (KOAFEC)" (University of the Witwatersrand, 2013, p.134). The report further notes that by 2013, the institution had significantly increased its research output. The Faculty of Humanities, which houses WSoE, contributed up to 20% of the research output at the University of the Witwatersrand (University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities, 2014b). This was in form of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference presentations and proceedings, edited volumes, monographs, and book chapters. The Dean in the 2013 research report speech, noted that the School had "demonstrated an increase in research output with the contributor-base becoming more diversified with a significant increase in the number of young emerging

academics and researchers publishing in highly rated journals, nationally and internationally" (ibid.).

A significant segment of research in higher education is the academic space occupied by postgraduate students. The School of Education 2013 report indicates that 150 master's and PhD students graduated during the 2012-2013 academic year (op. cit.). Although the report does not provide statistics for each of the five schools in the faculty, it clearly implies that the student-supervisor engagement occurs in a conducive and productive research environment in the faculty.

Against this background, both the faculty and school of education in these universities have the capacity (though not adequate), both human and material, to guide, mentor and supervise doctoral students. It is therefore meaningful to explore the context of the departments/divisions in these faculties as the venues in which doctoral supervision takes place.

5.6 Departmental context

Departments are internal administrative structures within which universities are shaped, in addition to the physical structures, the patterns of routine interactions amongst students, doctoral supervisors, other members (support and administrative) and other institutional leaders, deans, principals, (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). These relations form the characteristics of the department in terms of size of the department, its service charter, technology (the practices, systems, or methods the organisation/department uses to assess its work-flow activities). Dependence on other organisations/departments and levels of control (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings & Turner, 1969) are crucial for its existence and efficiency. To

perform its functions, the Faculty appoints members of the department and determines which courses/programmes to be offered in the departments (University of California, Los Angeles, 2014). Departments become the focal point of curriculum development, innovation, instructional evaluation, teaching, and research. Departments are further described in the section that follows:

5.6.1 Managing departments

Operations within a department are handled by a Head of Department or Division (HOD) in most universities in South Africa. HODs provide academic leadership within the hierarchy of the university. They take responsibility for student learning at all levels, enhance research, knowledge transfer and staffing at the department, manage human and financial resources and boost quality assurance in the department (The University of Sheffield, 2014). Critical is how the holder of this position manages to create an enabling environment for supervision of doctoral students. Surprisingly, while this appears to be a challenge, dynamics in the departmental context are complex and difficult to understand in the South African context. This is captured by these supervisors about heading a department:

> *In a university, the position of head of department is a very managerial position, it is not academic. It is pure admin stuff and I was HOD. for six years… There is no academic leadership, there is no academic guidance, it is not what one can think, it is not academically guided. There are forms to fill in there, you know, you have to do a document and other documents. I don't want to spend my time on that, I would rather spend my time on…on… my career, my students, my PhD students, my postgraduate students and my time is valuable for that other stuff* (Stinka).

No am not in managing position and will walk away from any kind of management at this stage in my life… (Charisma).

Therefore, experienced academics are not interested in taking on managerial responsibilities in South African context. The result is inexperienced junior staff members are the ones who are appointed or nominated to such positions. Administrative positions provide the ground for contestation in a structured top-down management, pitying the management and doctoral supervisors as they supervise PhD students. As will be discussed in Chapters nine and ten, such administrative practices have an impact on individual supervisor's motivation.

5.6.2 Socialisation

Even though they may be contestations and tensions with a department, departments are seen as the agents of socialisation of doctoral students (Austin & Barnes, 2009). Studies have established that departments are the central points of control and operations of doctoral education (Geiger, 1998; Nerad & Miller, 1996). Like other universities, departments, and divisions at UJ and Wits play a critical role in establishing recruitment, admission, and completion requirements, provision of teaching and learning resources, preparation of curriculum in the respective disciplines (Golde, 2005). They provide a "stimulating research environment with colleagues with which to learn and share ideas and opportunities" (Backhouse, 2009) as well as the implementation of the expected rules, regulations, and standards of supervision of doctoral students. Some also organise self-help groups and doctoral students learn how to research (Phillips & Pugh, 2010). In some institutions, the departments provide access to communal office spaces and socialising rooms. These basic academic amenities have become requirements for those funding doctoral students (Leonard

& Becker, 2009). Thus, over time, these practices are entrenched in departments and constitute a unique culture and context that shapes student experiences (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Although departments play a critical role in socialisation of doctoral students, they are also marked by attrition at the doctoral level. For instance, in South Africa, the DoE (2001) estimates that up to 20% of doctoral students do not complete their studies. A recent study in South Africa indicates that "there are currently no measures in place that can even accurately determine attrition rates let alone explain its prevalence" (ASSAF, 2010, p.77). Other reports indicate that university departments suffer loss of resources due to attrition (Golde, 2005). This scenario leads to the following questions: *What are some of these issues, practices, people, or situations in the department that lead to problems? Are departments responsible for some of these issues? What kind of students are admitted?*

Some scholars posit that the environment of doctoral supervision is negatively affected by the practices of the department. For instance, departments tend to utilise specific selection and admission requirements which do not illustrate the students' full potential to meet the demands of doctoral studies except for the grades they scored at the master's level (Kezar as cited by McAlpine & Norton, 2006). They observe that these admission requirements rarely show "the kind of learning that will be required of doctoral students and thus the outcome is unreliable to learn what will be expected" (p.8). Such defects in the admission criteria make a case for supervisors to justify poor performance. In addition, given the inadequate knowledge about how to navigate through the doctoral process (Golde & Dore, 2001), students are not accurately informed about what is expected of them in doctoral education. For instance, a close look at the Wits School of Education and the Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg websites reveal that both institutions provide admission requirements (academic

qualification, levels of experience, a draft research proposal, availability of a supervisor in the particular area and written or oral interviews where necessary) (Wits School of Education, 2014; University of Johannesburg, Faculty of Education, 2014) but do not describe what the PhD candidates should expect. At UJ, the admission process is such that "a student ... normally contact[s] the department or a potential supervisor and seek[s] advice on admission, a potential research idea and the assignment of a supervisor to his/her study" (University of Johannesburg, Faculty of Education, 2014, p.10). It is not clear whether supervisors clarify the nature, challenges, and pitfalls of undertaking doctoral education. Thus, with inadequate information about PhD studies given to students initially, departments cannot easily absolve themselves from what appears to be tribulations of supervisors as they engage with doctoral students in South African universities. There is limited information about how supervisors interact with the department beyond the rules and regulations each department prepares to guide the supervision process. Understanding this dimension (departmental context), with particular attention to how departments facilitate doctoral supervision, is a critical step in making doctoral supervision more effective.

5.6.3 Research

Another contextual issue that is significant in higher education institutions is research. Backhouse (2009) notes that departments should provide a stimulating learning environment that enhances knowledge production, teaching, and dissemination of the knowledge. A study by Boice (1992) reveals that some experienced faculty and departmental members were not dynamically engaged in research and these members actively opposed research efforts by their younger peers. This issue contradicts the observations by McAlpine and Norton (2006) that "academics are aware that research skills, not their teaching abilities, lead to success in the academic world" (p.8). But this brings into focus the contested view that teaching in a

university is secondary to research. Such contradictions and tensions about teaching and research can be detrimental to the academic environment that HODs are expected to foster in the department, which is fundamental for doctoral supervision.

Although there may be a divide among members of the department as pointed out above, challenges of supervision globally seem to focus on individual supervisors and students instead focusing on the department or faculty. Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) point out that contextual challenges experienced by supervisors in South Africa are the overwhelming numbers of PhD students allocated to supervisors and the development of generic skills among candidates as some of the contextual challenges experienced by supervisors in South Africa. Surprisingly, that Higher Degrees and Postgraduate Studies Policy at UJ:

> [Does not] limit the maximum number of postgraduate students any one staff member may supervise, but it expects faculties to manage throughput purposefully with due regard to student progress and academic employee workload, and to place a premium on quality management considerations in this regard (University of Johannesburg, 2014, p.9).

These issues are more departmentally oriented than individual, yet literature on the impact of the departmental context on doctoral supervision and research remains scarce. Operations in the department can best be understood within the context of how supervisors operate within the disciplinary context.

5.7 The contested nature of disciplines

The other site of research that is overwhelmingly felt in the process of doctoral supervision is the disciplinary and the interdisciplinary context. Gibbons *et al.* (1994) advocates for an interdisciplinary approach to research in higher education against the age-old

golden disciplines, which view knowledge as demarcated spaces with different scholars occupying each space that is governed by different customs, practices, and conventions (Hodge, 1995, p.35; Gibbons *et al.,* 1994). The main point of dispersion between these two perspectives relates to the nature of society's problems and the way academics are engaging in research to address challenges of a knowledge society. In this section, I focus on disciplinary and interdisciplinary dynamics as critical contextual aspects of doctoral supervision in South Africa.

*a) **Understanding a discipline***

Since the times of Plato and Aristotle, the medieval times (11th - 13th century) and the enlightenment age of the 17th century, to the establishment of research universities from Germany to the USA and elsewhere in the world, answers to complex, social, cultural, technological and economic problems have been found in specific (field) disciplines by people specialised in those disciplines (Strober, 2010). Academic disciplines follow certain conventions and practices in their common goal of knowledge production and dissemination. In this endeavour, academics/researchers have been working within specific disciplines that are constituted by certain "values, conventions and norms governing the processes through which the knowledge [is] conceived and produced" (Parry, 1998, p.273).

Nevertheless, the concept of discipline is highly contested and understood variably by different people. Given the process that is followed in initiating new members into a particular discipline (community), Foucault's definition of a discipline as "a violent political force and practice that is brought to bear on individuals for producing 'docile bodies' and minds" (Krishnan, 2009, p.8) would suffice. It is the docility that disciplines create (that is, people who comply with certain maxims in a discipline) that makes people experts in a discipline.

Such people adhere to "a system control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of the identity taking the form of a permanent reactivation of the rules" (Foucault, 1976, p. 224). This definition aids this study in that it suggests that the knowledge culture and context in which doctoral supervisors have been socialised in and centres the genesis of a structured process and ways of doing things in which doctoral students are made to adhere. It also forms the basis for contestation in supervision research and practices in university departments.

In the context of the university, disciplines form the basis upon which departments strive to thrive. This is reflected in many practices that may have a bearing on how supervisors engage in the process of supervision. The variety of networks between academics, students, funding organisations and professional organisations are formed based on disciplines and scholars in specific disciplines which pursue specific kinds of knowledge, a tradition that has a long history (Usher, 2002). In the context of policy practices, disciplines are "homes within larger learning communities" (Donald, 2009, p.48) in which scholars determine acceptable knowledge that merits advancement by members of that discipline. Accordingly, procedures followed in of doctoral programmes is based on various disciplines. With such an understanding, it becomes clear that supervisors operate within their disciplines and are guided by disciplinary communities oriented towards accumulation of "traditional 'truths' accumulated over time … universal, objective, disciplined, planned, tested and reliable findings" (Gibbons *et al.,* 1994, p.147) which can only be applied by a different set of people in a completely different environment (Usher, 2002). Since they are defined by "objects, methods, theories and propositions, tools and techniques, which are restrictive and sometimes endlessly productive" (Hodge, 1995, p.35), their aim is to enhance specialisation (Holley, 2009) in certain and specific basic human knowledge (Winberg, 2006). In this regard, it is

argued that disciplines tend to pursue pre-selected knowledge and skills, leading to the mastery of these skills and knowledge (CHE, 2000). It is within these specialised areas that doctoral supervisors engage their students. Disciplines, to an extent, determine the mode of interaction, skills, and knowledge to be transmitted at the doctoral level. This contextual dimension has been the driving force of universities in their core business of advancement of knowledge (Usher, 2002). Working in such environments as supervisors, the one-on-one model of supervision is embraced and portends tensions among those who engage in co-supervision models.

Seemingly, the contemporary world seems to derive diminishing satisfaction from advancement of knowledge and is critical about disciplines. For instance, in South Africa, disciplinary knowledge is perceived to be highly isolative, far from addressing important social, economic, and cultural issues (Winberg, 2006). The argument that it satisfies knowledge and skills makes it quite challenging in South African environment. Besides, disciplines have become too narrow to solve a plethora of human challenges (Newell, 2001), too abstract and arbitrary that they make it difficult for researchers to freely discern and express the links that exist between phenomena (Krishnan, 2009). Usher (2010) points out that the PhD has been criticised for being too narrow, and specialised and does not encourage interdisciplinary training, is devoid of broader skills, and that the thesis is not an appropriate vehicle for collaborative work. It is the changing nature of the society and the need to address shortcomings of individual disciplines that partly inform PhD supervision contexts.

b) ***Interdisciplinary context***

The National Academy of Science defines interdisciplinary research as:

> A mode of research by teams or individuals that integrates information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, concepts, and/or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge to advance fundamental understanding or to solve problems whose solutions are beyond the scope of a single discipline or area of research practice (Strober, 2010, p.16).

Certain aspects emerge from the discussion above. Problems whose solutions are beyond research within a discipline have been identified and individual researchers in the university today cannot engage in solving these problems without some form of collaboration or borrowing from another discipline. The effect is that universities have been reframing and restructuring their programmes to enable researchers to operate in teams and through collaboration. For instance, the universities of Stanford, Southern California, and Purdue, in their strategic plans between 2004 and 2008, included an interdisciplinary approach as one of their key goals (Strober. ibid). Incidentally, in South African universities, researchers are racing to be on par with universities globally. Hence, doctoral education is viewed as a gateway to prepare the next generation of professionals and scholars for the "local and national economy…… and educating their domestic and international graduate students to participate in a global economy and an international scholarly community" (Nerad, 2010, p.2).

As universities in South Africa pursue these goals, it happens that inter-disciplinarism is permeating context in institutions of higher learning, seemingly dictating the nature and kind of knowledge and graduate needed at the marketplace. What is not clear is whether supervisors in graduate schools and faculties of education in South Africa are prepared to work in such a knowledge transforming environment. An interdisciplinary agenda is on the minds of academics and being discussed in departmental corridors, representing the knowledge economy while seeking adjustments to postgraduate supervision and research practices, as espoused by those who guide doctoral students. Siemens, Smith, and Liu (2014)

observe that both doctoral students and researchers are raising more complex and technologically sophisticated questions that call for collaboration. In addition, the present knowledge economy requires flexible, multi-skilled employees with openness to learning, and working in a dynamic globalised environment that is characterised by multiple information and communication technologies (Usher, 2002). In South Africa, in the transforming environment in which universities are operating, an interdisciplinary approach seems to be viable and the "promise of a solution to the dual problems facing South African higher education: the need for skilled graduates for national reconstruction and global competitiveness" (Winberg, 2006, p.1160). This is in tandem with the view that the world is operating in a more practical way, and knowledge produced is legitimised based on "its performativity or its capacity to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the socio-economic system" (Usher, 2002, p.146). "Knowledge [is] no longer … regarded as discrete and coherent, [with] its production is defined by clear rules and governed by settled routines" (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). These factors have sandwiched supervisors between the traditional disciplinary obligations and the dynamics of knowledge economy (Usher, 2002) and as in other countries, they are being challenged to work in teams even as Amabile *et al.* (2001) caution that team/collaborative skills need to be clearly understood and developed.

As tension mounts between disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to research and supervision, there is need for more clarity for those fronting interdisciplinary approaches to research. For instance, while arguments in favour of interdisciplinary approaches to research and supervision are plausible, it remains unclear on how supervisors who were trained in a discipline and learnt how to supervise on the job will readily accept the drastic change and work in interdisciplinary contexts. Also, some societal problems can be typically addressed by research in specific disciplines. However, these contexts are real and doctoral

supervisors operate in an environment laced with these realities. How do they navigate this terrain?

5.8 Quality assurance and doctoral supervision - contemporary trends

Given the increasing role of doctoral education to the society, universities have come under heavy scrutiny about the quality of graduates they produce and the PhD programmes that are offered. However, to understand quality assurance as a contentious contextual issue that can influence PhD supervision, the concept of quality assurance needs to be defined.

Quality assurance assumes different meanings depending on the various discourses underpinning higher education. Scholarly discourse conceives it as planned programmes, structures and practices that are executed aimed at producing world class graduates. The labour market discourse defines quality assurance as production of graduates who can meet the needs of the labour market, and the discourse of change that implies development and constant improvement in programmes and practices to achieve the best (Mashal, Odeh, & Abu-Mosa, 2012; Mishra, 2007). Harman and Meek (2000, p.v) conceptualise quality assurance in higher education as the "systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by a higher education institution or system to monitor performance and to ensure achievement of quality outputs or improved output".

Quality assurance seeks to develop parameters that facilitate monitoring and improvement of educational practices, thus providing the basis for confidence and commitment to the achievement of the desired output in higher education (Harman & Meek, 2000). At the doctoral level, its focus has been on research as the core mission of higher institutions while still paying close attention to teaching at the undergraduate level (Byrne,

Jørgensen & Loukkola, 2013). The creation and application of knowledge is crucial in our understanding of the commitments of higher education and the improvement of its outcomes. It has a regulatory function that is entrenched in the general principles and practices of higher education and attention is paid to the underlying forces that determine effective and highly productive supervisory approaches. What seems to be implicit in these perceptions is that at doctoral level, supervisors must ensure that the goals of each discipline, the economy, and the social aspect of the society, are achieved.

But the context within which doctoral supervisors work, is indeed saturated with tensions, contradictions, arguments, and misunderstandings in favour or against quality assurance. Harman and Meek (2000) are of the view that this exercise plays a significant role in enhancing credibility, public accountability, improvement, and institutional programmes' revitalisation. In this understanding, the discrepancy between the initial purposes and the actual levels of performance, generate the tensions that call for quality assurance practices. Similarly, Byrne *et al.* (2013, p.12) emphasise that "quality assurance aims to demonstrate the accountability of higher education institutions to stakeholders audit usually [with] aims to improve the quality of education." Counter arguments argue that continued surveillance on lecturers and teaching curtail their "academic freedom and pursuit of knowledge" (Hoecht, 2006). Whether this is a case to discredit the practice of quality assurance in higher education or not, one thing remains clear, that "quality is a key concern of academia across the globe and several efforts in multiple directions are made by administrators and academicians to induce this component into the teaching and learning situation" (Zaki & Rashidi, 2013, p.1098). Within this understanding, the implicit explanation is that the quality of doctoral education rests on the hands of supervisors and the doctoral programmes (curriculum). In the long run, this exercise determines how doctoral supervisors engage in supervision and by

extension, the institution they work for, given the restructured universities described earlier in this chapter.

In South Africa, quality assurance practices which include quality of delivery of teaching, volume and range of teaching, innovation in teaching, general communication with students, management of teaching, and evaluation of own teaching (Koots A.S., nd) are intersected with diverse issues of transformation and matching the research excellence at global level. In this context, a quality assurance system is intended to ensure that higher education and training programmes at postgraduate levels are relevant preparation for teaching, and responsive to the needs of learners, employers and other stakeholders within the context of the social, intellectual and economic requirements of societal development (CHE, 2001).

Those charged with teaching and supervising doctoral candidates in South African universities are expected to ensure:

> Greater accountability and efficiency in respect of public financing, trends towards mass participation in the face of shrinking resources, and greater stakeholder scrutiny of education and training processes and outcomes have led to the increasing implementation of formal quality assurance arrangements within higher education institutions and systems (ibid, p.1).

Thus, as pointed out by the HEQC document, quality assurance is not only about institutional programmes and university lecturers and what they do, but also the fraternity of stakeholders such as the DHET, HEQC, CHE and employers, that benefit from doctoral education. Issues of accountability, efficiency, and equity as enshrined in the 1997 education act, form the basis of quality assurance in higher education in South Africa. At postgraduate level, policy frameworks in South African universities, at both institutional and faculty level,

have outlined the necessary steps to enhance quality teaching and research. For instance, at UJ, doctoral student proposals are submitted to departmental doctoral committees, Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, the faculty board, and the Senate Exco (Senate Higher Degrees Committee - SHDC) for ratification (University of Johannesburg, 2009). This process aims at ensuring "the highest levels of quality care in regard to postgraduate studies" (ibid, p.4.). Similarly, the University of South Africa (UNISA), provides an elaborate quality assurance process, outlining the structures that are involved in the enforcement of the policy and structure (UNISA, 2009). Key to quality assurance practices are the structures that institutions put in place, the regulations that govern them, and the people who enforce these regulations.

A concern in this study is the way doctoral supervisors operate in this context. As pointed out earlier in Chapter one, supervisors in most South African universities are overwhelmed by research, teaching, and administrative responsibilities. The question remains on how they deal with the context of quality assurance amid a congested work schedule.

5.9 Global ranking and PhD supervision atmosphere

Japan wanted ten of its universities to be listed among the top 100 in the world rankings by the year 2013 (Ishikawa, 2014). Russia's academic community is expected to have five of their universities listed in the top 100 by Times Higher Education (THE) rankings by the year 2020 (Efimova, 2014). The ambitious plans by Japan and Russia are examples of the many countries engaged in a complex, highly expensive contest to improve performance in higher institutions of learning. Ranking of universities is conducted by government-accountability bodies, accrediting and commercial ranking organisations that seek to place a measure of performance on each university at national, regional, or global levels. Ranking

itself has a "common factor that present indicators of quality – explicit or implicit – that are weighted to produce an outcome which, in its turn, is ranked in comparison with all other such results" (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2009, p.11). For this study, I pay attention to the tensions that rankings progressively generate in the context of doctoral supervision in South Africa.

Doctoral supervision seems to be the key ingredient that invites local, national, regional, global ranking practices in universities (Gonzales & Núñez, 2014). At the national level, Apple (2013) commenting on accountability practice in the UK and the USA observes that:

> Across borders, the daily life of faculty members and the content of the curriculum are being steadily transformed by 'audit cultures.' The demand to constantly 'produce evidence' that one is acting correctly – in essence to act in an entrepreneurial manner – has spread …. in the USA, there is now growing pressure on university faculty to enumerate the ways in which their work has 'value added' effects (p.387).

Similarly, commercial rankings are legitimised based on "opinions [made by] business leaders who denounce the 'delay in universities' internationalizing efforts" and emphasize the need to cultivate global capacity among graduates" (Ishikawa, 2014, p.6). Ranking primarily aims at marketing the institution, providing information about the institution to prospective students, lecturers, parents and employers (Buela-Casal *et al.,* 2007**)** and "promot[ing] an image of the university as a high-quality establishment or as one striving to attain high international standards" (Ramírez, 2013, p.132). In this respect, a variety of parameters are used to rank higher education institutions. Indicators such as publication count, staff numbers, citations per academic as well as "universities that are regionally important or those targeted at widening access to higher education with a view to involving a wider cohort of young

people" (p.13). The Learning and Teaching Performance Fund **(**LTPF) provided other parameters for ranking higher institutions in Australia in 2003. The fund aims at rewarding institutions that "best demonstrate excellence in learning and teaching" (Thakur, 2007, p.85). Thus, these quality maxims, among others, form part of the context within which supervisors operate in South Africa as ranking institutions persists.

South African universities have been ranked well at both regional, continental, and global levels. Literature on university ranking in South Africa however remains scarce. What is available relates to media reports. For instance, in December 2013, The Times Higher Education (THE) released an assessment of more than 700 Universities from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) along with seven other emerging economies in which South Africa posted five universities of the top 100 (Marcfalane, 2013, December). Commenting on this report, Wits University Vice-Chancellor said that "Wits University welcomes the rankings but will not let it detract the university mandate to build a nationally responsive and globally competitive institution." He reiterated that "Wits aims, through teaching and research endeavours, to serve the country, the continent and the world" (ibid, 2). The University of Cape Town executive director of communication pointed out that:

> Good performance in international rankings does assist in sending the message that a world class education is available in South Africa. Equally, prospective students and staff the world over use the rankings to decide where they wish to study and advance their academic careers (Op. cit, 2).

In the context of South Africa, the views expressed by the university officials are critical in two ways. Firstly, they affect how academic staff identifies with the ranking process and secondly, how they strategize on how to maintain ranking both as a marketing tool and a device for academic excellence. For instance, institutions that provide increased access to

formerly disadvantaged people may not necessarily provide an understanding of how PhD supervisors deal with teaching, research, and supervision of students selected from this cohort to pursue doctoral education. Additionally, the call to publish and be cited in a bid to have the institution well ranked heightens the tension among those involved in supervision and their urge to productively engage in research. However, the continued posting of best performing universities globally, is bound to continue unsettling those charged with doctoral supervision in South Africa.

5.10 Working for and in knowledge economy

One of the main defining features of modern democracies is knowledge economy. The Knowledge economy concept has been conceptualised differently by different knowledge practitioners. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004, p.201) perceive knowledge economy as the "production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advances as well as equally rapid obsolescence". Smith (2000) notes that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) attributes the meaning of the term to "those [countries] which are directly based on the production, distribution, and use of knowledge and information". Whereas these conceptions emphasise the view that countries are guided by new knowledge in their quest to achieve economic growth, most authors acknowledge that these definitions are inadequate in capturing the full essence of a knowledge economy (Brinkley, 2006; Smith, 2000). For this study, the diverse conception of knowledge economy will be instrumental for understanding how such context of meaning variation impacts on knowledge production in the context of PhD supervision.

The need for higher education institutions – particularly at the doctoral level – is to focus on research and production of new knowledge that is embedded in theories of economic development (Park, 2011; Nerad, 2009). According to the authors, these theories posit that economic development is defined by the extent to which nations produce highly skilled labour and new knowledge that is not only instrumental in changing the society, but also capable of introducing new ideas and ways of thinking that inform both political, social, cultural and economic development. For this reason, Slaughter, Rhoades, Powell and Snellman (2004) are of the view that the present pace of economic development, as witnessed/experienced in organisational, scientific, and technological, health and environmental innovations, is rooted in innovative ideas generated within the confines of doctoral education.

Thus, the unfolding of the 21st century has seen nations rely on new knowledge which leaves them with only one choice: to have higher institutions of learning work in collaboration with societal institutions, communities, industries and other corporate organisations to maximise the benefits of a knowledge economy (ASSAF, 2010). Slaughter, Rhoades and Snellman (2004) point out that one aspect of a knowledge economy is that it always draws more on human intellectual capabilities than physical or natural inputs. This feature of the knowledge economy has infiltrated master's and doctoral programmes and supervisors are expected to train people who can be leaders in generating new knowledge and innovative practices (social, cultural and technological) that can spur the general development of society. In addition, university faculty staff are expected to do more research that defines the relationship between knowledge and the economic system (Park, 2011). Park acknowledges that workers in a knowledge economy framework are described as "innovative, entrepreneurial, collaborative, self-motivated and self-managed, flexible and reflexive, and with an international perspective of their work" (p.226).

Doctoral supervisors in South Africa work in an environment that is driven by the pursuit of new knowledge in harnessing human and physical challenges. Therefore, universities are compelled to train graduates that reflect the fast-changing context defined by the features outlined above and at the same time, meeting the needs of South Africa's social, economic, and technological aspects of life. However, in South Africa, the continued disconnect between the quality of graduates produced at PhD level and the expectations of the market (ASSAF, 2010), seem to suggest that there a missing intersection between supervisors and the kind of knowledge they produce and the labour market. Their position in understanding the aims and goals of a PhD and the perceived pressure from those who need knowledge to solve societal challenges, makes it even more challenging to function in this context.

Thus, the context created by a knowledge economy seems to further determine where and how doctoral graduate will work. This means that universities, industries, business and governments work in consonance and the findings of basic research are translated into action (Nerad, 2010). This is happening as doctoral students are pursuing careers outside academics, prompting graduate schools in South Africa to consider professionalising doctoral studies, and intensifying their focus on market specific fields (Dahan, 2007). In Canada for example, studies reveal that 60 to 70% of doctoral graduates seek employment outside of academia (AUCC, 2003). The problem in such a context is how supervisors go about preparing doctoral students to meet the needs and demands of the labour market in a knowledge-driven economy. The author acknowledges that the need to produce either professional non-academics or non-researchers indirectly affects supervisors. Generally, tensions between economic and epistemological forces affect the context within which the South African supervisor works.

5.11 Doctoral programmes as a context of doctoral supervision

The context of doctoral supervision in South Africa today also stems from the nature of doctoral programmes that are offered. A programme is "a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification" (Government Gazette 5 October 2007). Doctoral programmes in South Africa follow the old paradigm and focus on traditions that are closely related to what was offered in universities of Western Europe (Backhouse, 2009). The South African research doctorate doctrine emulates the research degree that was mooted by the University of Berlin during the nineteenth century and rapidly spread to the United States of America and England by 1861 and 1920 (ASSAF, 2010; Park, 2005), reaching South Africa during the colonial period. This type of degree according to Goodchild and Miller (1997 as cited by Park, 2005) was characterised by the format where students attended seminars, submitted a thesis, and successfully defended the research orally before a panel of experts. In other words, it embraced and underscored the value of integrating teaching and inquiry, encouraging students and lecturers to select and engage in disciplines that motivated them and the value of solitude in pursuit of truth in the context of a community of scholars which comprised of both students and the academic staff members (Backhouse, 2009).

In South Africa, doctoral programmes, as discussed in Chapter two, have taken the form of two main models: The apprenticeship (one-on-one) which is the most common model and the cohort model which is currently being experimented with in many universities (ASSAF, 2010; Backhouse, 2009; Dietz *et al.*, 2009). These two models have different effects, advantages, disadvantages on both students, supervisors, and their environments. Significant to these models is that they determine the extent to which supervisors rely on certain mediation strategies and the rationale behind banking on this strategy. This in effect

impacts on students' general supervision experiences relating to intellectual, social, and interpersonal experiences.

In the recent past, course work doctoral programmes have been introduced in some South African universities. According to Dietz *et al.* (2009, p. 9), "some universities have PhD degrees in which there is a mandatory seminar-based component without this changing the value or significance of the 'full research dissertation'. An example is the seminar-based PhD in Education Policy of the University of Pretoria." At the University of the Witwatersrand, the Faculty of Humanities WSoE hosts seminars, workshops and conferences that involve both local and internationally distinguished scholars (Wits Faculty of Humanities Report, 2013). This is founded on the Higher Education Framework Qualification (HEQF) stipulation that "coursework may be required as preparation or value addition to the research but does not contribute to the credit value of the qualification" (HEQF as cited by UJ policy on higher and postgraduate studies policy, 2013, p.6). Seminars and workshops in most South African universities focus on "epistemology, research methodology, critical thinking skills and discipline-based theory" (ASSAF, 2010, p.65).

According to the HEQC, course work in doctoral studies in South African does not contribute to the credit value of the qualification (Government Gazette Notice, 2007 October). The assumption made is that the amount of course work undertaken at the master's level, in addition to its being a basis for admission, adequately equips students to undertake a research doctorate. Course work PhD programmes or models are not accredited by the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (ASSAF, 2010). However, arguments for course work in doctoral studies in South Africa are still persistent. Dietz *et al.* (2009) hinted at the possibility of introducing the American model of inclusion of some compulsory course work

modules in South Africa. At the same time, the context is calling for inclusion of this element as it plays a critical role in contexts such as South Africa, where both undergraduate, honours and master's programmes tend to fail in equipping students with adequate capacity to participate in doctoral programmes (ASSAF, 2010).

Although some academics call for course work in doctoral education in South Africa, variations in academic cultures and contexts, for example in the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK) and South Africa have a bearing on such changes in the curriculum. For instance, ASSAF (2010, p.65) advances the view that: "What may work well in one discipline, or at one university, or in one country, may not be directly transferable to other areas". In South African universities, local students and international students' stream in having diverse backgrounds, nationalities, and understandings of doctoral research degrees and this partly informs their displeasure about such changes. Generally, such perceptions about the nature, place, and context of course work in doctoral programmes in South Africa affects how doctoral supervisors and students interact and experience supervision.

5.12 Students as critical elements of supervision context

The context of doctoral supervision is also shaped by students who enrol in doctoral programmes. Bourdieu (1986) gives an analogy of the doctoral space to a football field. Bourdieu acknowledges the players, their positions and all other things that impact on the players as they play. Therefore, in the context of supervision, doctoral students constitute a critical context of doctoral supervision.

Students come to supervision encounters with different backgrounds, experience, and profiles. These are reflected in their attitudes, values, assumptions, abilities, and motivations

that determine their will to undertake doctoral studies. The current study found that PhD student ability varied so much, as expressed by this participant:

> *You must understand the context of your student, you must understand that even if you can help it doesn't matter the students you have… you must understand that every PhD student is unique and has his or her own baggage and …., so you cannot compare. You know I cannot compare; I am sorry to mention people who come from up Africa and whatever and there are some people strive to get [do odd jobs], balancing survival and your studies* (SPh2.).

Generally, the profiles and backgrounds of students who enrol for doctoral studies is brought to question. This data suggests that supervisors work with students whose abilities are different despite having met the admission criteria. What effect does this have on supervision? Firstly, students with language problems usually take an extended time period to complete their studies. Secondly, as they supervise, supervisors may lack the rigor and a stimulating environment that is expected from doctoral students in a researcher environment. The effect is that supervision experiences are not as challenging and thought-provoking as they should be. Overall, the challenge related to the nature of students raises questions about admission criteria, the mode of supervision adopted by a supervisor, and the context within which doctoral students are drawn. Rademeyer (1994), for instance, points out that supervisors should be responsible for addressing these challenges.

Cross and Johnson (2008) stress the value of students' background as factors that can facilitate or constrain their intentions, interpretation of their actions, and the world around them. Jamil and Shah (2011) supports this by acknowledging that the quality of teaching, learning and research in institutions of higher learning is reflected in highly talented students.

However, Lovitt (2001**)** contends that students' backgrounds are not responsible for the attrition or completion rates but rather, what happens within the university after matriculation (that is, the context). While Lovitt's views may be true about attrition, Cross and Johnson's (2008) argument makes sense because it relates to what motivates students to enrol for postgraduate studies, the criteria followed during their admission and their personal engagement and actions as they undertake their studies to completion. The present study examines the students as part of the context in the doctoral supervision process.

The second issue relates to the quality of education at undergraduate, honours and master's levels. The recently widened access to and increased demand for higher education without proportional increase in members of academic staff in South African universities, which affects the context of supervision (Mouton, 2011, p.22; CHE, 2009; Mouton, 2007, p.5,) has resulted in the admission of "poor quality of students" into doctoral programmes (Mutula, 2011, p.188). While the expansion of higher education has benefited many former disadvantaged groups and stakeholders (the industry, politicians, employers, and media pundits), there has been waste and decadence in the whole exercise (Hussey & Smith, 2010; Materu, 2007). As a result, these authors claim that universities give away degrees and research is not well conducted, with universities producing 'illiterate' and incompetent graduates who must be retrained to work (Arun & Roksa, 2011).

Student expectations of a doctorate degree also have a bearing on the process of supervision. Some students get into doctorate studies because they are persuaded by their former lecturers or supervisors at honour's/master's levels, availability of funding, the need to improve their income, affinity for research and knowledge and future career prospects (Backhouse, 2009). In considering all these factors for enrolment, it may not be clear whether

prospective candidates understand what is involved. Similarly, prospective supervisors may not establish each student's motivation to do a PhD. This cross-purpose approach to the exercise makes the context of supervision more complicated.

A further dimension relates to the diversity of the postgraduate student population. At the postgraduate level, supervisors work in an environment characterised by students with diverse work experiences, age, nationality, levels of preparation and modes of learning among the many prevailing social backgrounds (Herman, 2011). Racial and gender representation at all levels of higher education is an effort to comply with the 1997 Education Act (CHE, 2009; DoE, 1997) where the drive towards of achievement of diversity was more prominent. CHE (2009) points out that the context of postgraduate in South Africa is differentiated by race with White and Indian students embarking on postgraduate studies. Another issue of diversity relates to the presence of international students in South African universities. A proportion of PhD candidates come from the Southern African Development Corporation (SADC) region and other Africa countries (Herman, 2011; CHE, 2009). Among these students, disparities manifest in the programmes for which they enrol. This is reflected in the increase in the number of part-time students in professional fields such as education, public health, and the sciences (Nerad, 2010), in addition to full-time students. A critical aspect of an internationalised context is the language of instruction (ibid). South Africa embraces English as a medium of instruction, whereas students from non-English-speaking African countries are also admitted, thus complicating the environment of doctoral supervision. The government's position on diversity in transformation, internationalisation pressures and the fact that the higher education "system is producing very few black South African doctoral graduates" (CHE, 2009, p.61) to a very large extent creates a context of tension among supervisors as to how they should approach doctoral supervision.

Finally, Dietz *et al.* (2009) describe the characteristics of types of doctoral candidates, and the PhD culture, as significant idiosyncratic aspects of doctoral students that determine how they learn. These authors point out that some students prefer working on their own without close supervision, others "prefer a personal relationship with their supervisor, as long as not much discussion (or even none at all) about the progress of the PhD work is discussed, while others are very business oriented and are private about their personal lives" (p.74-75) as they interact with supervisors. These individual learning experiences can also be transposed to supervisors' way of engaging with their students. Where their engagement culture is not congruent with that of the students, contestations and tensions emerge.

5.13 Management and supervisor motivation context of supervision

Experiences of doctoral supervisors within the administrative ranks in the university can affect their motivation to work. The extent to which managers in high ranking positions are experienced in supervising doctorates and publishing greatly affect supervisors' motivation to work. According to this supervisor, this does not only apply to departmental and faculty heads, but also the entire university administration:

> *I do support supervision of doctoral candidates but the tendency at this stage I think is not (pause) if you look at…at who is heading, who is the person heading a university, they haven't got experience, they can talk a lot about academics, they have got a lot of book knowledge about it. But training, they haven't got the basics, but they then don't come through the ranks. If you haven't published yourself, how can you tell me how to publish? ... If you haven't supervised a master's and a doctorate student and experienced what the troubled person there is, what their challenges are when these*

people try to run towards a goal post, how else can you tell somebody how to supervise? That is crazy! (Charisma).

From this supervisor's tone and facial expression, contextual challenges in doctoral supervision can be attributed to institutional structures, particularly those charged with the management of the university, faculty, or the department. The supervisor questions why people who have not adequately supervised doctorates or published can possibly lead/manage supervisors. The supervisor is bewildered about the appointing authority in the institutions of higher learning. Although these views may not directly be perceived as challenges of doctoral supervision, they impact negatively on supervisor motivation. Supervisors often find themselves caught between their own intellectual power and the administrative power, which has more to do with the context in which universities are situated. Of importance to this study is the assumption that the silent competition between the intellectual - cultural capital - and the management, which influences the supervisors' motivation, and inhibits their supervisory functions. This participant's reaction points at the tension caused by the structured social space of positions that are governed by rules and regulations determined by the field (Grenfell, 2008). Although entrance into these social spaces is subject to minimal qualifications (Waquant, 2006), from the interview with this supervisor, social spaces in the ranks of management seem to operate differently from those in academics when it comes to appointment in administrative positions. The effect is that some of these structures can enable or delimit (Outhwaite, 1990; Held & Thompson, 1989) supervisor performance and levels of motivation. Consequently, it can be discerned that receiving instruction and being managed by people who hardly understand the dynamics in doctoral supervision, can be demoralising.

The performance management requirement employed to establish supervisor performance is another issue that demotivates supervisors. Despite the heavy workload, supervisors are expected to meet certain targets defined by these indicators. This participant points out that,

> *To enhance supervision and enhance postgraduate studies on that level, on the PhD level in this specific department or, on this specific faculty and I think that hasn't really taken place because we almost are overwhelmed with the performance management system… that is actually part of it, we are almost in the push for performance…[*Gaja].

The above narrative by one of the supervisors reveals that supervisors are pressured to perform and are heavily scrutinised as the faculties and departments go all-out to meet their strategic objectives. While the exercise serves the right managerial purpose, its effect on supervisor motivation is not known by those in management in the South African context.

The context of supervision then is like a foreign recipe where supervisors, students, and doctoral programmes struggle to discover the right ingredients in order to give the best supervision experience. In this case, the intersecting context of doctoral supervision constitutes the diverse recipe, as represented in the following figure, Figure 5.1.

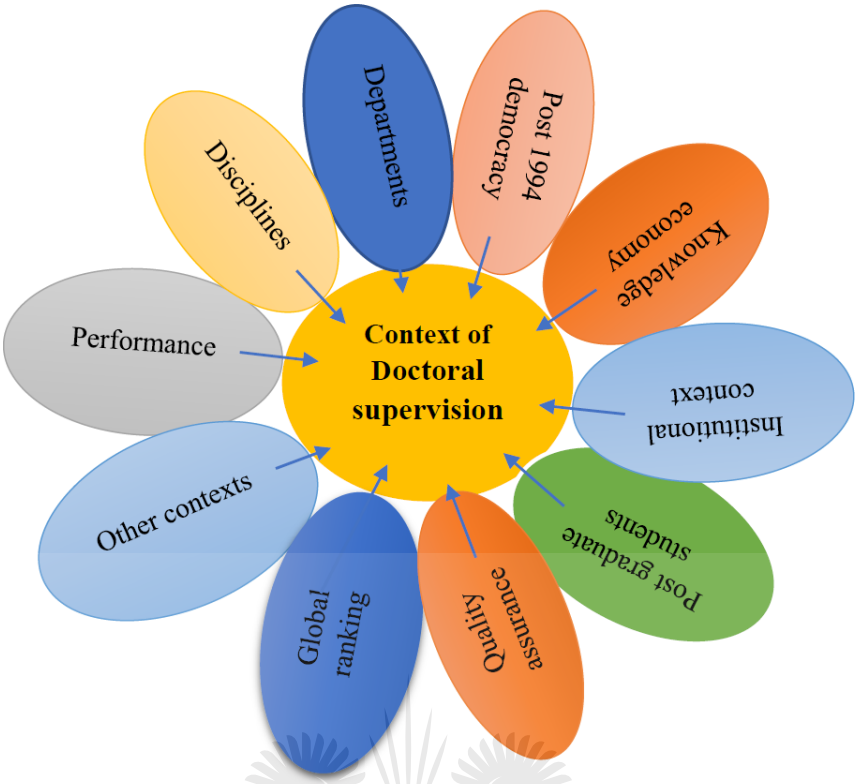

Figure 5.1: The intersecting context of doctoral supervision in South Africa

Source: Created by the author

5.14 Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter was to discern and describe some of the contextual factors that affect the process of doctoral supervision in South Africa. A brief background outlining state policy, legislative, and educational practices during the apartheid era was presented. This was an important aspect because of the significance of the post-1994 policies and practices in education that were centred on issues of redress, access, equity, efficiency, quality and restructuring of institutions in higher education. The process of addressing these issues involved reorganising the previous 36 universities into 23, classified as universities, comprehensive universities, and universities of technology. The effect was that policy practices inadvertently favoured undergraduate access leaving postgraduate studies. While

policy practices had a memorandum on doctoral studies as far as 2007, as a jumpstart for economic and technological development, a few South African universities continue to produce 80% of the PhDs in the country, leading to an annual production of 28 PhDs per million, which is still considered far below the expected 100 per million.

The concept of field as a space for expression of social and cultural capital was used as a theoretical framework. The idea of field as a concept was backed by the intersecting context of doctoral education by (Backhouse, 2009) and provided the space to look at how institutions, departments, disciplines, knowledge economy, and issues of quality assurance, as some of the local and global factors that influence the context of the doctoral supervision process in South Africa. Other contemporary issues that need to be considered include attrition, funding, and the changing nature of research. It should be noted that most of these issues converge to sessions of supervision explicitly or implicitly, providing direction to both the researcher and the researched.

As these issues enter and influence the process of supervision at doctoral level, supervision of doctorates continues. The ultimate objective of this encounter is becoming a researcher and being able to supervise others. The next chapter focuses on what it takes to become a doctoral supervisor.

CHAPTER SIX

The making of a doctoral supervisor: personal experiences and supervision trajectories

6.1 Introduction

The genesis of doctoral supervision among Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) supervisors has its beginnings in their experiences as former PhD students. This chapter aims at providing an exposition on how experiences of current doctoral supervisors as PhD students shaped them for their present careers. In retrospect, the chapter investigates the lives of current PhD supervisors as prior PhD students not only to describe their experiences then, but also to examine these experiences as the basis for their supervisory practices today. To achieve this, the chapter addresses the question: *How do supervisors' experiences as PhD students inform the way they supervise their PhD students?* Although the data did not reveal any significant learning/training experiences as prior PhD students, participants in this study revealed mixed experiences of their roles as supervisors. The data on these experiences reveal that although numerous past experiences have been beneficial to supervisor growth, there is some kind of frustrations because the lessons learned were never implemented by the supervisors.

The remainder of this chapter presents experiences of PhD supervisors as PhD students and the moulding a PhD supervisor. Section 6.2 provides the conceptual framework that will guide the chapter while Section 6.3 deals with experiences of PhD supervisors as PhD students in relation to their supervisors. It focuses on the 'levels of strength' of supervisors as described by PhD students. This is emphasised by what I describe as supervisor credentials as told by the participant, before I focus on the issue of supervisor management

and how the process is bound by context. Inherent in these interactions are tensions which I label as the remedy for assertiveness and confidence among PhD students.

6.2 Conceptual framework

Numerous frameworks can help understand PhD students' supervision experiences. In this chapter, I deploy dimensions of the concepts of habitus, capital, and field (Bourdieu, 1986) to frame the understanding of the making of a doctoral supervisor ingrained in PhD training experiences. Habitus is described as "a mental filter that structures an individual's perceptions, experiences, and practices taken for granted, common sense appearance" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2012, p.654). It is a complex internalised material that determines individuals' daily operations (Reay, 1998b), interweaving the past and the present in a complex but rich way, for an individual or a group of people in a class (Gorski, 2013). The concept was employed to reflect on the supervisors' background, relationships, practices by their supervisors and perceptions about their time as PhD students. In the end, I can deduct from these experiences, some of the behavioural practices that can be traced to supervisors' secondary socialisation that occurred at school, which are the major sources of material for individual habitus (ibid.).

Reference is also made to the concepts of field, as advanced by Bourdieu (1986). In applying this concept, I reflected on the interphase between the individual, the field of doctoral supervision, and the environment within which PhD students (now supervisors) were supervised. I utilised the metaphorical use of field to refer to universities (faculties and departments) and "individuals involved in a particular social or cultural arena [supervision of doctoral students] and the interactions between them" (Devine, 2012, p.4) and their students. This concept is used to isolate and describe the context in which supervisors operate to

discern the contests and tensions among students and their supervisors, supervisors, and their peers as well as how competition intensifies reproduction of the field (Warde, 2004). I use the concept to unmask the kind of tensions and contestations that characterise and generate the kind of struggles and competition between supervisors and their students.

Skills and knowledge arranged to socialise and train doctoral students in all the disciplines are at the heart of cultural capital. Cultural capital refers "to non-material resources and goods such as educational credentials, types of knowledge and expertise, verbal skills and preferences that can be converted into economic capital" (Appelrouth & Edles, 2012, p. 656). This concept is utilised to extract supervisor credentials and levels of expertise from supervisors' narratives at PhD level, many years ago. From these accounts, the credentials of their first doctoral students are exposed, thus helping to explain the criteria used by supervisors to allocate students and the knowledge dynamics that inform co-supervision practices.

6.3 Being supervised: experiences, awareness, and understandings

The concept of supervision has been dealt with in detail in the second chapter of this thesis. I have highlighted the way supervision has evolved with time, changing the context of doctoral education. In this section, I reflect on the voices of supervisors during their time as PhD students themselves. I attempt to provide a foundation of experiences, perceptions, and understandings of practices upon which their present roles are anchored. Through supervisor' narratives, an attempt is made to answer the following questions: *How did the current supervisors experience PhD supervision? How did they respond to PhD supervisory experiences they were exposed to? What did they draw from these experiences?* In responding to these questions, I discuss some of the themes that emerged from the interviews with

doctoral supervisors. In some incidents, I report experiences that were unique to specific individuals and how they responded to them. For analytical purposes, various constructs used to describe different species of experiences that are discussed. The names, *Gurus, Famous, Hilda, Charisma, Stinka, Sally, Leah, Gaja, David Do* and *Jarem* are pseudonyms for participant supervisors to ensure confidentiality.

(i) Constructing a 'strong and weak' supervisor

As doctoral students, through their interactions with their supervisors, current supervisors constructed certain mental images that represent the quality of supervisors and nature of supervision they received. In this study, supervisors' intellectual prowess and pedagogical agility are summed up in terms of strengths and weaknesses by supervisors who participated. Accordingly, this section examines what it takes to be a strong or weak supervisor from a PhD students' perspective, currently PhD supervisors. Asked to describe their experiences as students under a supervisor, several themes emerged. Several participants described their supervisors as strong and experienced researchers, yet others had their own reservations about their supervisors. My sample selection comprised supervisors who had supervised for more than ten years, among them were those whose PhD supervision experience spanned for more than twenty years and here I draw on the excerpts to determine what, according to these supervisors, counted as 'strong' and proceed to elucidate the importance of these experiences as benchmarks towards becoming future supervisors.

> *…well I was supervised by two very strong people and we were on almost on a friendship basis… yes there was an authority relationship. However, both of them being strong the… one in one field of training and the other was in another field of training* (Charisma).

Apparently, the participant's response suggests that his supervisors were well versed with content and knowledge in their field of study. According to this participant, a strong supervisor is an academic advisor, is one who is friendly, knows his or her subject area very well and is capable of listening to his or her PhD student. To some extent, the friendly nature of supervision encounters can at times stall the progression of one's studies.

Hilda, with strong gestural approval explained that her supervision experience was enhanced by the ability of her supervisor whose focus was on research, academics, and publishing:

> *I did my PhD in [Europe] (name of university and country withheld). My supervisor was a man he had just published a book which made him famous. I was lucky because when I started working with him was the year the book was published* (Hilda).

Another participant, Famous, noted that his first encounter with his supervisor ensured him of the way forward and even though he was in Europe, he realised that he would be comfortable working with a person well-experienced in his field:

> *Alright I did my PhD in [Europe name of the university withheld] under the supervision of a very, very (nodding head in approval) experienced supervisor, (name of supervisor withheld) ... I could clearly see, you know, that I was going to be comfortable, I was going to be under the guidance of somebody who is an expert in that field.*

Leah described every supervision experience as insightful with the supervisor challenging her and giving her aspects to consider:

> *I had a very, very good supervisor, what my experience was that every supervision session was an enlightenment …so I wasn't intimidated like how students get intimidated sometimes but it was ….it was an amazing experience because the person had a lot of depth and could really sharpen my ideas, could really direct me.*

Gaja was fortunate to be supervised by some of the most experienced supervisors of his time in the faculty. During that time, PhD students were expected to work on their own and be self-motivated:

> *…they were very experienced that is one thing I got from old supervisors. They were very experienced. They were in their sixties – early sixties. And they were used to doing things in a certain manner and they were used to getting students that are self-directed... So, they wouldn't be able at that time to handle students that are not self-directed (Gaja).*

Jarem, whose PhD spans was done in South Africa pointed out that:

> *My supervisor was good but also at the same time he kind of spoon fed me when it came to quantitative research …. I had to learn those skills of engaging with different research methods* (Jarem).

In contrast, to the above, some supervisors had little or nothing to remember about their encounters with their supervisors. Some, like Sally expected more from her supervisor and ultimately had to rely on herself and work independently:

> (Laughing) *Well…I didn't have a strong supervisor, so I cannot really say that he assisted me at all… I was one of those doctoral students that mainly worked on my own and what the supervisor did was to read my work and to give some comments here and there. So, I did not have a supervisor that really strongly supported me, strongly guided me* (Sally).

This participant's reluctance to fully comment on her experiences was reflected in her persisted pauses, hesitations, sarcastic smiles, and rhetoric questions prior to her response. Sally did her PhD at a university in Africa.

> *Why… why…* (hesitation), *my… I have done my PhD… doctoral studies so many years ago, so many years ago, so why do you want to know that?* (Sally).

Similarly, another experienced and busy supervisor found difficulty recalling his experiences with his supervisor but did comment on the way they tended to work:

> *Oh… this is years ago, I can't, I can't remember much, you know, I can't remember much except maybe to say that the supervisors those days allowed for a lot of independence. You know, so I had to work on my own and then the supervisor tried to be the gate keeper to tell me you know you can't continue with this but then… but then we had lots of interactions around* (Gurus).

From these transcripts, several things arise. First, a few supervisors indicated that they had 'strong' supervisors. Indeed, the strength of supervisors was reflected in the participants' gestural, facial, and head movements, and at times pauses that seem to indicate that they were looking for the right words to describe their supervisors. The notion of 'strong' as used by the participants suggests that effective supervision serves as a function of one's scholarship as opposed to the muscular endowment regularly used. In this case, supervisors who were well published, accomplished researchers, supervisors, authorities in some disciplines, experienced and respected in their fields were defined as strong and capable of providing all the necessary support to their students. While there is a general feeling that 'strong' supervisors adequately guide their students, that is not necessarily the case as suggested by Jarem that 'good', otherwise strong supervisors sometimes, *'spoon feed [PhD students] when it came to [to some of the skills and knowledge students have to learn on their own] research whereas I had to learn those skills' (Jarem)*. Certainly, stories about supervisors 'spoon feeding' doctoral students can be damaging not only to doctoral programmes but the fraternity of supervision in doctoral education. Secondly, 'Weak' supervisors, whose responsibility was mainly to read and give feedback to students – in the form of '*comments' but did not 'strongly support……[nor] strongly guide… [PhD students*]' (Sally) were also identified. This set of PhD supervisors brings to the forefront the discourse of doctoral education as an independent study where students are left to work on their own. Significant however, is that 'weak' supervisors (supervisors whose approach to student supervision is mainly hands-off) are hardly published, experienced, famous and do not provide students with diverse support structures. Generally, participants who in most cases were left to work on their own hardly mentioned what their supervisors had achieved in the fields of research and publication.

The labelling of doctoral supervisors as either ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ by students can be a significant beacon in their lives in so far as a career in supervision is concerned. Doctoral students, experiencing supervision under the two types of supervisors, develop imaginative perception, which Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1996) call ‘fictive identity’ in literary studies. The authors posit that “fictive identity, like characters in literary fictions, is composed not only of elements of the [doctoral student’s] already-experienced world of understanding, but also of the various cultural myths associated with the idea of [doctoral supervision]”. Fictive identities and images among doctoral students can be instrumental in restructuring their habitus and emulating strong supervisors to construct such identities in order become doctoral supervisors themselves.

(ii) Becoming a supervisor: a forgotten, personal choice or an unintentional aim?

In its account of the roles of a PhD supervisor, the School of Law, University of Waikato states that supervisors are expected to assist students in “the development of the research, in undertaking the research and in the writing up of the results of the research” (Makinnon, 2004, p. 397). But it does not include other important outcomes of the supervision process such as becoming a supervisor and relating with other academic staff. While this may be the case for PhD candidates with a sense of aligned ambition, that is, capable of setting goals and cultivating skills and knowledge (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999) that can enable them to supervise doctoral students later in their careers, such figments of imaginations slip off the mind of others and they pursue the prescribed aims and objectives of the PhD in accordance with their supervisors’ expectations.

To unravel what makes a supervisor, I sought to examine whether doctoral programmes and practices either intentionally exclude becoming a supervisor as one of their

aims, whether such choices are left to students or whether becoming a supervisor was an unintentional outcome of supervision. Accounts from participants were varied and indicated that a wide range of different factors played out for each of them. Hilda [one of the participants] was more emphatic about what her feelings were. '*I think, the job of [having a] PhD is not just about supervising a thesis, it is about educating and mentoring a scholar to become an independent researcher'*. She understood her role as a teacher was to impart knowledge, which allows her to think of herself as not only as a researcher but also someone capable of supervising or training others to her own level. This reaction is reminiscent of "a troubling discrepancy between…. the formal view of postgraduate studies and the reality which comes to be constructed by the initiate's own experience" (Lee & Williams, 1999, p, 6).

But becoming a supervisor can also be a host of several factors including aligned ambition, love for academia, personal ambition and the taken for granted view that every PhD holder must supervise doctoral students. This is articulated by Leah, who was neither influenced by nor trained to become one,

> *No* (laughing*) no, there was not, I joined academia because I liked the idea of being at the university, working at a university and I progressed basically that's a personal ambition, there was no influence. Nobody ... specifically who influenced me. It is not about developing interest in supervision …. So, it is not about developing interest, you must do it and [if] you are not willing to do it, you should not be in academia*.

Leah's background and goal to work in academia were aligned with why she enrolled for PhD and the fact that she '*liked the idea of being at the university'*. This echoes Schneider

and Stevenson's (1999) account that educational expectations need to be in line with the professional aspirations. In this case, personal ambition, '*willing [ness] to do it'* and '*developing interest'* were basic assets in her path towards becoming a supervisor.

For other doctoral supervisors, supervision of doctoral students is not and was not part of their training as students. But in the field of academia, '*it was part of the job description, so when you are appointed at the university that's what you do, you supervise. That's part of your job description*' (Gurus). Besides, it is all about commitment to academics:

> *Basically, the kind of job and you…, we all have to supervise. It wasn't in my training. I become and am interested in academic work…, [that to me is] what it means to me to be academic, an academic is researching sometimes with the students* (Leah).

Admittedly, this perception of doctoral qualification remains a theme of contestation as in whether current supervisors should engage in research or teaching at undergraduate and graduate level. Decisions on whether to engage in research as you supervise doctoral students is contingent upon the supervisors' background, interests, and personal ambition.

It also emerged that some of the present supervisors had long decided to work in academia while others, whose careers were outside academics, did not consider themselves developing into career supervisors in the field of academics. *'No. I think as a PhD student that never come into [my] mind'* (Famous). But he believes that becoming a supervisor is a function of aligned ambition.

Generally, what determines whether one will become a PhD supervisor is anchored on professional background. Academic staff members enrolled for doctoral degree tend to have a set trajectory of becoming supervisors, while those in other sectors (government and private sector) rarely think of moving into academia and becoming supervisors.

(iii) Multiple frameworks for supervision: the genesis

Experiences presented in the preceding section provide trajectories of multiple frameworks upon which supervisors become supervisors and the base of their current supervision practice. This study found that the genesis of diverse multiple frameworks of supervision resides in multiple factors including personal experiences and contexts of supervision. The position presented here shows that practices and/or frameworks adopted by supervisors are not always a replica of their experiences as PhD students, as expressed in literature (Backhouse, 2009; Grant, 2008; Dietz *et al.*, 2006). The context within which one is supervised influences how he/she supervises doctorates in the future. In the next section, participants' reactions, in relation to the role of personal experiences and contextual influences on the choices made, is examined.

a) Personal experiences and the choice of supervision framework

Personal experiences constitute a structural code of culture inscribed as habitus that generates the production of a variable social practice (Nash, 1999, p.177), which include pedagogical practices in doctoral supervision. When asked to clarify how their experiences as PhD students differ from what they do with their doctoral students in terms of supervision today, personal experiences as PhD students were articulated. Famous was more specific and resolute about how supervision of supervisors' own doctoral studies has influenced general practices of supervision:

To a very large extent… you know I must, you know, tell you that most of us tend to supervise the way we were supervised. So… if you had a particularly poor supervision process, it is likely that you will always engage with your students using the same framework that is poor in supervision. If you had a good framework it is likely that you also be using similar kind of positive framework.

This participant tends to strongly believe that a poor approach to supervision leads to poor selection of the supervision approaches. On the other hand, Jarem never thought of himself as a supervisor during his time as a PhD student. Supervision came as part of the package for employment without any prior training:

I started being a supervisor when I got appointed here…., I came to this academia raw. I was a principal of a school and I got to fill a vacancy of a lecturer who got a position in Australia and I had to take over the students and supervise. I had a low experience of supervision. It was based on how I was supervised.

With limited experience, Jarem applied the skills and knowledge of his former supervision experience to supervise students. Of significance, is the fact that the framework for supervision, adopted at the beginning, is mapped out from one's own experiences as a PhD student.

Frameworks adopted by supervisors may seem out of reach, important and all-knowing thus intimidating students and making them feel 'small' and incapable of working without them. In other words, power engulfs the supervision environment making the

supervisor even more powerful in this environment. This is how Leah felt as a PhD student. In fact, some of the experiences made supervisors realise that supervision at the doctoral level was a game of power struggle and dominance. As a supervisor today, the framework she adopts steers clear of intimidating students.

> *I think that one very important thing for me is that I want my students to feel at ease with me. I want them to feel safe. I don't know if it's well … necessary but I want them to feel safe that if they get stuck, they don't feel they cannot call, they can't come to a meeting that is unplanned or they cannot drop an email or something…. It's something I don't think …. But I was younger, and I don't know if it was him or me. So, in other words given the experience that maybe I was intimidated I felt that if that was all related, then I want my students to may be… respect me but I want them to feel safe.*

The environment created by Leah's supervisor is indicative of turf wars in which power and dominance come to the fore and supervisors, depending on their background, display their power in an intimidating way in a way that the student placed the supervisor on a pedestal. These experiences though negative, influence their own framework of supervision and compel them to downplay issues of power and domination (where possible) to provide a free and balanced context of learning at doctoral level, thus making students feel safe. Feelings of power can elevate supervisors to supernormal beings:

> *It was like he was 'god' to me; you know! So, I think that my relationship with students is more… is slightly more open. I think they feel safer with me than I felt then,*

but … He was like much more advanced at the time I think or maybe I was…but I think I don't know … (Leah).

Such strong sentiments about a powerful supervisor are indicative of the field of doctoral supervision and the offshoots of "positions, dispositions, and position taking of agents" (Warde, 2004, p.12) that define relationships, which in some ways, can have a bearing on how students relate to supervisors during supervision encounters.

Generally, there is a tendency to replicate the supervision framework and experiences individual supervisors had with their supervisors. Although Famous seems to demarcate between 'good' and 'bad' supervision out rightly and what seems to be automatic replication of these practices, he seems to ignore the fact that people's habitus can adjust according to the circumstances. The reality is that the of mirroring of a supervisor's mode of supervision and general framework as part of the acquisition of secondary dispositions, cannot be denied (Boudieu, 1990). The assumption is that bad habits become imprinted in PhD students and ignore PhD students' flexibility and agency in "facilitating the growth of individuals into new circumstances [such as when they become doctoral supervisors] as well as trammelling them within familiar ones" (Baker & Brown, 2008, p.58). Similarly, PhD students who had interesting experiences, have had the opportunity to improve with the emergence and development of new models of supervision - which according to Gorski (2013) leads to a new kind of habitus.

b) Choice of framework: a contextual function of supervision

Doctoral supervisors may not necessarily learn from their own personal experiences to supervise doctorates. A supervisor's habitus and cultural capital respond differently to the

work context triggering some form of realignment of supervision framework for some supervisors, while others tend not to be sensitive to the context. For instance, Hilda feels that what she does with her PhD students is quite different from the approaches she experienced with her PhD supervisor. This is reflected in various aspects of supervision including frequency of meetings, nature of the PhD, the process, and the accompaniment as far as the process was concerned. On the frequency of interaction and as a part-time student, she had this to say:

> (Long pause…then) *I think my supervisor supervised me differently from the way I supervise. He was good enough to see me once a week because I was only there for eight weeks. So, whenever I went there, he was very accessible to me.*

The participant did not either begin her PhD in the conventional way by preparing and submitting a proposal – the structured way of doing PhD. She leapt from proposal writing, data collection, analysis, and discussions of findings to writing, which was unconventional in a doctoral programme, particularly in a South African university. In other words, supervision of PhDs can take various forms, according to Hilda's account:

> *At that point, we were not really looking at my writing, I was not writing yet. We were just talking about things; you know I wasn't giving him any writing; he was just helping me to formulate what I was doing. You don't write a proposal, there is no proposal process. You get a supervisor, he starts working with you, I didn't even have a topic, ok. I just knew that I was going to work on what I am going to work on.*

This account suggests that reading and discussion 'talking' constitute an important aspect of the foundation of the doctoral supervision process. Students and supervisors brainstorm their way forward by identifying and clarifying the research problem or topic that forms the basis of their research project. In addition, the quest to instil publishing instincts in experience tended to be the focus of the supervision experience. However, South African institutional procedures are not flexible in that they follow certain steps and stages; thus, Hilda has not drawn directly from her PhD supervision:

> *Alright, now and then you know in the beginning I [asked] him how do I write my thesis? He said to me 'don't worry about the thesis. You write a thesis at the end ok but don't stop writing'. So, write articles, write papers, and you worry about the thesis later. He never worried about the thesis, but I wrote, I wrote all the way as I was doing my PhD* (Hilda).

The focus on writing articles and papers and attending seminars and a series of courses organised by her supervisor and other academics in the department, constituted an important step to development of the supervision framework adopted by her supervisor.

> *I also attended all his postgraduate seminars. Ok, so I did his course. So, the input I got from him was also from his courses… So, I attended both his two courses. Ok so that is the input I got from him and then supervision sessions would be my asking him what I needed to know* (Hilda).

Thus, in the world of doctoral supervisors, there are many resources that serve to equip PhD students with cultural capital which is useful when they transition into academic and start

supervising doctoral students themselves. In addition, some supervisors focus on imparting multiple skills – skills for writing for publication followed by thesis writing skills. Hilda's accounts illustrate the difference in how she was supervised and how she currently supervises. This is attributed to the context (social space) in which PhD students seem to demand more care, support, and attention in comparison to when she studied and needed to work predominantly on her own:

> *My students here, many of them are not capable of working independently, they would not know what to do if they were left on their own … They just wouldn't. I mean he [my supervisor] never helped me analyse my data* (Hilda).

With such students in the South African context, other supervisors adopt creative frameworks that are suitable for students. Sally, who described her supervisor as not having been strong and supportive, ensures that she works as closely as possible with her students and supports them as much as she can with a variety of aspects. This contradicts her own supervisor who preferred to leave students to work independently. Thus, the initial ways in which researchers construct supervision, in relation to the nature and context of supervision, influence the framework that they adopt.

> *Ooh, how I supervise students, oh, ok; you know there is huge vast difference [from my own experience]. I work very closely with students we meet very regularly, we have discussions about… in terms… the way that the study should progress, I guide them in terms of the best literature that I think … the relevant literature in the field, I would initially not give very detailed comments, what I request is that students do a draft, they also should not try to perfect the draft* (Sally).

Other doctoral supervisors are of the opinion that PhD candidates should be left on their own to study independently. These views, as pointed out in the following quote, represent supervisors who sustained social and intellectual experience during their doctoral studies that eventually shaped their way of supervision, regardless of the context of their current students. Gurus noted that his supervisor left him alone most of the time and he managed his studies in that format and that is his current supervision framework. He posits*: 'I think. You know, PhD students should work independently. … I think, I believe….*' Working independently as a framework of supervision has not been clearly defined in contemporary literature. Independent work, as revealed in this study involves individual students working on their own and receiving feedback on their proposal writing, research (data collection) and thesis production. Gurus's beliefs are typical of supervision practices embedded in the one-on-one model as described in Chapter two of this thesis. Although this (apprenticeship) model has been described as one that involves one student and the supervisor, I posit that within the formal framework at departmental level, this is the case but beyond formal arrangements. A study by Backhouse, Ungadi and Cross (2015) found that informal meetings among doctoral students provided a productive forum for them to exchange views and experiences of supervision which greatly improved their understanding of the views and perceptions of supervisors' oral/written feedback. Thus, the long-standing debates on the nature of the one-on-one model have continuously ignored the social nature of learning. Bragg (1976) states that:

> it is the socialization process that allows education to achieve its goals. The sociological process [that] individual acquires the knowledge and skills, the values and attitudes, and the habits and modes of thought of the society to which he belongs. Thus, the socialization process encompasses all learning—the affective as well as the cognitive (p. 1).

A lot of literature focuses on student-supervisor engagement in the contexts of disciplines, departments, and faculties. However, there is need to focus on social dynamics that constitute the social environment of doctoral students and the conglomerate set of dispositions, values and attitudes that are ingrained in this process beyond the supervisors' comment and advice. Nevertheless, current supervisors, with experience from their time as PhD students, have had a more critical understanding of how to supervise their students and gives them an opportunity to reflect and adjust, improve or change the academic environment, depending on the nature of students and the context in which they operate as they experience their trajectory towards becoming supervisors.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter showed that current supervisors had interesting and varying experiences during their time as PhD students as they transitioned to doctoral supervisors. The data revealed two major themes: firstly that supervisors, who were perceived as strong, were those who were well-published, experienced and critical while those who were considered 'weak' were not experienced, well-published or noted in their field and were viewed as not being close to their students and in addition, did not provide multiple feedback. Nonetheless, participants in several ways revealed that their supervisors were qualified as supervisors, with some indicating that they were "comfortable" or "had published" and "good critical comments". As a pedagogical practice, the study revealed that regardless of where supervision took place, experiences differed from one student to the other. The data also revealed that supervisors in different contexts experienced the process of supervision with their students differently.

Although supervisor experiences provide an oasis of skills and knowledge in the initial stage of supervision, because of prior experience with their supervisors, some were eager to depart from the 'old ways' and embraced viable approaches to supervision. For instance, issues such as inability of students to work independently and constant need for support by students in South African context has meant that supervisors have had to adapt their framework of supervision to effectively scaffold students in South Africa today. Leaving PhD students to operate independently was not viewed as progressive and therefore an unpopular approach. It seems that this approach has been superseded by a more hands-on approach to ensure that supervision equips students as upcoming researchers , not only with skills and knowledge in research, but also ultimately supervision skills (interpersonal skills, developing and managing relations in supervision encounters, and modes of motivating mature students) that should not just target future academics, but also those engaged in working in other professions beyond the university.

Drawing on relationships and interactions that current supervisors have had with their supervisors, this chapter has illustrated that supervisors' experiences provide valuable resources useful in discharging their functions. Nevertheless, most of the participants revealed personal ambition, passion for knowledge and the job requirements as the key forces that transformed them into doctoral supervisors. Thus, a common feature that emerged was that participants did not conceive supervision as part of their doctoral studies and something they needed to deeply understand. The focus of being trained as a researcher and writing of a thesis did not really provide systematic learning and understanding of doctoral supervision. In the next chapter, I highlight supervisor experiences with their first PhD students and how these experiences prepared supervisors to take up roles in the process of supervision.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Becoming a doctoral supervisor: exploring experiences of a neophyte supervisor

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter two, I alluded to the fact that supervisors learn how to supervise PhD students by experience. I pointed out that knowledge and skills on how to supervise are gained once a new supervisor is assigned a student. In Chapter four, I indicated that through interviews, supervisors' accounts of their first supervision would be unravelled. Consequently, in this section of Chapter seven, I analyse their stories. I reflect on the question: *How do supervisors experience their first supervision assignment?* The argument made here is that preliminary experiences of supervisors are instrumental in forming/constituting them for future tasks but may be fraught with issues that they need to confront. While most supervisors acknowledged that their initial experiences with their first PhD students were interesting, there were other unforeseen issues that complicated the process.

Based on these experiences, this chapter reflects on how doctoral supervisors were introduced and initiated into supervision with their first doctoral students. Section 7.2 presents the conceptual framework of the chapter. Section 7.3 isolates real experiences of doctoral supervision and strives to account for interactions and reactions that explain how people begin engagement with the practice of doctoral supervision. The chapter reveals that unlike other professions, most PhD supervisors find themselves at the centre of supervision as per their job descriptions.

7.2 Conceptual framework

Initially a novice or junior PhD supervisor has to prepare to work in a field with highly qualified people, and then must contend with new sets of relationships depending on the institution. Finally, they must develop their skills in order to become confident to make decisions and support students in such a way that supersedes their superiors in the field. With such context of operation in mind, this chapter draws on the study's conceptual framework which locates doctoral supervision within the concepts of field, habitus, and capital (Bourdieu, 1986). It assumes that the way junior supervisors engage in the process of supervision is a function of how they respond to various situations and people. I therefore deploy the concept of field (Bourdieu, 1986) to reflect on some of the contextual factors that these supervisors contend with as they engage in the process of supervision. In applying this concept, I reflect on the interphase between individual supervisors and their initial interactions with their colleagues in the department/faculty and the nature of power play that ensues as they interact. Factors such as age, experience, credit, recognition, and management of situations in supervision encounters are explored, as well as the tensions and contestations that result from social and cultural interactions between PhD supervisors and their students (Devine, 2012).

The chapter also derives from the concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to the qualifications and experiences (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) both PhD supervisors and students bring to the context of supervision. This kind of capital suggests that both PhD students and PhD supervisors can take up their roles and to some extent, challenge each other given that they are dealing with knowledge. Thus, cultural capital takes a unique form in that it is a significant enabling attribute in allocating students to supervisors, depending on their intellectual abilities. To reinforce the concept further, I make use of the concept of identity

transformation as used in Chapter six to understand initial dynamics of a junior supervisor in transformation.

Experiences that shape our actions and reactions constitute our habitus. I deploy this construct to provide an understanding of how junior supervisors approach their new assignments and how they respond to the environment in which they find themselves. In other words, does doctoral supervision happen in an organised and routinised manner, excluding issues and practices that run counter to the process? (Kemp, 2010). This concept is critical in understanding supervisors' past experiences, levels of confidence and the role that age plays in the process of supervision.

7.3 Exploring supervisors' initial experiences

The data revealed that working with students whose performance was below par, experienced co-supervisors, managing relations with both students and co-supervisors, and being assigned difficult students, were found to be critical in the preliminary experiences of novice PhD supervisors. The following sub-sections pay attention to some of these issues.

(i) Weak PhD students and novice doctoral supervisors

The current doctoral supervisors had diverse, difficult, and challenging preliminary experiences when they became supervisors. Difficulties varied depending on where and when they started their careers as supervisors and the nature of students as far as intellectual capabilities were concerned. It emerged, for instance, that supervisors were often assigned students who were not up to par academically and deemed 'weak', yet they were expected to supervise the students at doctoral level and learn in the process. Some of them, as revealed in

these accounts, were thrown into the 'deep end of supervision' and left to walk an acrobatic rope to completion with their first candidates - sometimes taking too long:

> (silence) *I need to point out the fact that as* (silence) *the first supervision is often a very, very difficult one for a number of reasons but chiefly, the main reason is that when you get your first student, the supervisors who are already there in the school where you will be working and you will be trying to do…. I mean to start working with your first student, usually those people - the experienced supervisors will take the best students and the new supervisors are often left with the weakest students. So here we have a situation whereby new supervisors, do … [not] know what they are doing because they have never done it! But they are landed with the weakest students and that can be extremely challenging… You never get to be given a strongest student when you get into a university. New members of staff are often given the weakest students and that is a problem* (Famous).

Jarem, as a novice supervisor, was assigned a student who had been 'rejected' as no one had wanted to take responsibility for the supervision: *'…. So, I recall back, I took a responsibility when nobody else wanted the student…. and the student graduated. That was my first PhD student.…. It was a trying experience; it was not easy'* (Jarem).

What emerges from these experiences is that although departments and faculties set the minimum requirements for admission to doctoral programmes, some students only just meet the minimum requirements (Cross & Johnson, 2008). However, in some cases, these so-called average students or 'rejected' students are successful. This view, confirmed by Lovitts (2001), explains that students who are less than average in academics, can also excel if

supported by access to resources (cultural capital) and scaffolding from a determined advisor (supervisor).

Several conclusions can be drawn from such practices or experiences. One, it is presumed that a department/faculty may intentionally introduce supervisors to the craft of supervision in the hard way - 'baptism by fire' - preparing them for future supervisions. Two, experienced supervisors may have had similar experiences when they started and given such background experiences, they seek to transfer these experiences to their juniors. Three, it is possible that the new supervisors, though naïve, may not either justify claims that they are allocated poor students, except that their inadequate experiences in supervision drives them to make such claims/observations. The effect is compounded when a student takes an extended period to graduate and is perhaps passed on from one supervisor to the next. At the same time, new supervisors are conditioned/socialised in certain ways and they remain 'faithful' to those ways in situations where students require flexibility. The effect is '*that you spend years and years with the same student because you are learning the job by yourself, but the student is also a one*' (Famous). Although time extensions to degree completion has been blamed on the apprenticeship model and candidates considered 'weak' in the fields of humanities and social sciences, (Kehm, 2006) this study adds that delays can also result from new supervisors' inexperience.

(ii) Abandoned on the way?

Accounts from junior PhD supervisors taking on abandoned doctoral students were prevalent. New supervisors were not only allocated weak students, but also those students who were mid-way their PhD programme but abandoned by their experienced supervisors on

the grounds that they were weak and therefore were unable to meet the demands of doctoral study. Notable in this regard is the experience of this participant.

> *The very first student I supervised was where one lecturer did not want to supervise the student because the student was not up to par and I had to take over actually it is not one, it is two different times… two different supervisors did not want to work with the students as they had their own problems in terms of writing. …. In fact, there were many instances I wanted to give up because I knew what the other two had experienced, there was resilience in me. I committed myself and ensured the student qualified. If you were to meet them and ask, then they would let you… explain how I was patient with them and how they have high regard for me as well* (Jarem).

This excerpt does not only reflect the different levels of resilience among supervisors, but also foregrounds:

> the structure of the life-style characteristics of an agent or a class of agents, that is, the unity hidden under the diversity and multiplicity of the set of practices performed in fields' which draws from individual's habitus and cultural capital and this incessant urge to try where others seem to have failed (Bourdieu, 1984, p.101).

The supervisor reveals a pre-disposition to change, challenging his own habitus. This is echoed in the translated version of the taped-recording supervision sessions. This is not however revealed in social and cultural capital in Bourdieu's case; it leaves a gap, a kind of misrecognition of one's shortcomings and arrogant self-confidence which is not captured well by the concepts of social and cultural capital. In a way, the supervisor challenges the existing habitus to achieve success.

Clearly, policies are in place in university faculties where supervisors, either through the laid down procedures or total breakdown between themselves and the student, decide to drop the student or discontinue working with such a student. However, some the supervisors show determination to work with weak students displaying understanding, patience, and resilience. It seems that in many cases seemingly difficult students are handed over to novice supervisors to supervise. Although the supervisor acknowledges that he knew what his predecessors had gone through with the student, it is not clear or evident that supervisors who abandon students are themselves perfect.

(iii) Fear, experience, and confidence

Working with difficult and abandoned students is not the only challenge that new supervisors experience. The study established that factors such as fear, lack of confidence, experience and age presented some challenges. Thus, what transpires is that some of the junior supervisors were exploited by the more experienced supervisors.

a) Age and initial experiences

Hilda points out that *'I was sort of young and naïve as a supervisor and I think he got most of the credit!'* Similarly, Charisma, who was employed in the same department where he did his PhD in a South African university, was hesitant and did not feel confident enough to be the main supervisor. He preferred to take the second slot with a lead supervisor (a co-promoter as he puts it).

> *I said you can't do it under me [referring to a student he was to admit], I will look for a supervisor because I am nervous, and I will find you a supervisor.… I will be your co-supervisor, so he said, "who?" I said that person, left the university and we were*

nervous and I [still] said I will find you a supervisor. So, I found one person who was well published at that stage and he became the main promoter and I became the co-promoter (Charisma).

But I was younger, and I don't know it was him or me. So, in other words given the experience that maybe I was intimidated I felt that if that was all related, then I want my students … to feel safe (Leah).

And we were supervising her masters and I mostly did most of the work because her master's was in my field not in her supervisor's field - Natal supervisor's field. But that was like a safety net because there was somebody there who was more experienced than me you know reading and trying to follow (Hilda).

The supervision aspect of a PhD student requires that a person who specialized in that subject area be on board. Being specialized, Hilda feels that she was taken advantage of, given that the credit was given to a co-supervisor.

I had a low experience of supervision. It was based on how I was supervised. So, there was no training at all. And that is why now I could see things differently in the way I supervise students (Jarem).

Neophyte PhD supervisors lack experience in student supervision. They rely on their own experience as PhD student. Generally, most the new supervisors lacked needed experience to effectively supervise PhD students.

Of course, I wasn't experienced as a supervisor, if I think back now, we had regular meetings (Gaja).

My God I really cannot remember who my first student was, you know I have supervised many students in my life that I do not have a clue who my first student

supervision, who I supervised, but the … probably is that supervision and the way you supervise with of course progress because one would learn from your experience as a supervisor you would understand what to do better. You would understand what the type of guidance is that students need (Sally).

Sally agrees that supervision practice improves as one gathers experience. Within your context of operation, you learn to prepare for needs of your students with time.

Considering these comments, new supervisors are exposed to the ill-defined world of supervision and co-supervision as they struggle to engage with their first students. There are those supervisors who position themselves to take credit for the whole process but with what seems to be very limited input. There is also a sense of inadequacy among supervisors, whose background, experience and knowledge are still developing because they are not at this stage experienced, thus not only displaying higher levels of nervousness but also acceding to power structures/relations inherent not only between supervisors and students but also between experienced and neophyte supervisors. Thus, at the centre of these dynamics are sets of dispositions and cultural capital - may be lower than that of experienced supervisors - that comes to play though supervisor qualifications and a more important presence or absence of experience between the two supervisors. These structured relations ensure the reproduction of both knowledge and institutional structures in academic institutions by providing support to junior supervisors (Tranter, 2006).

b) Deficits in confidence

Given that people who supervise doctoral students are themselves holders of doctorate degrees, their initial supervision experiences in some cases, tended to be affected by limited

confidence and as a result, the novice supervisor found the process challenging. This account depicts such feelings:

> *I don't remember but I assume I wasn't confident obviously (long pause…may be trying to remember/recall) I don't remember my first student but…it wasn't a traumatic experience otherwise I would have remembered, but I think it was probably harder* (Leah).

(iv) Recognition, power, and credit: adventures in PhD supervision

Novice doctoral supervisors also find it difficult to work as co-supervisors in several ways. Some participants explained that it seemed as though they had done the bulk of the work, including meeting students, making key decisions, and setting the pace for supervision, although they often felt excluded from some of the required procedures:

> *I was very angry with the other supervisor, because he hadn't done the work and he didn't consult me about the external examiner, so I was sort of young and naïve as a supervisor and I think he got most of the credit for that….* (Hilda).

Although this claim seems to overlook the fact that experienced supervisors have the role of mentoring the new supervisors, realisation that experienced supervisors are credited at the expense of junior PhD supervisors highlights the power struggle and competition that exists in the field of doctoral education. Lack of consultation and 'snatching' of credit from junior supervisors also presents another dimension of contestation and tension in supervision. It seems that junior supervisors initially are not aware of the rules of doctoral supervision "or, better, regularities, that are not explicit or codified" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.98) given

that most supervisors learn to supervise during the practice. In the supervision of PhDs, the responses are sometimes spontaneous and circumstantial and so are the revelations in co-supervision encounters. Clearly, Hilda "encountered a social world of which [she] is [a] product, it is like a 'fish out of the water" (ibid, p.127) as it experiences a completely different environment. In this case, this participant realised that she had taken quite a lot for granted.

Neophyte supervisors also find it difficult not only to get a co-supervisor on board but also to work progressively and effectively with them.

> *It was more difficult for me to get the co-supervisor on board than it was difficult to keep a PhD student on board* (Laughing). *But we worked, and, in the end, it worked really well. But working in a team [with a co-supervisor] was difficult because we don't have the same vision, to get everybody's mind into the same … in the field could be something else and he was a specialist in the field and I was a specialist in the context, but in hierarchy in university he was on higher position than I was* (Laughs). *He was a full professor which I am not. So, that in itself brought its own dynamics to the relationship* (Stinka).

Silent power interventions in preliminary supervision encounters cannot be ignored. As Stinka points out, novice supervisors are anxious and their minds are often filled with feelings of doubts, assumptions about senior colleagues, hopes, and expectations that make the process of supervision more daunting.

(v) Managing experienced supervisors: the dilemma of a junior supervisor

Execution of managerial skills forms part of the experiences that neophyte PhD supervisors encounter at their debut in doctoral supervision. Doctoral supervision is "a field of

forces, a force field … [which] contains people who dominate and people who are dominated" (Bourdieu, 1990b**,** p.40). These supervisors operate in a structured social space where they expect guidance or to be managed and mentored by the more experienced supervisors. But from this participant's account, a social space where you are in the middle of the power chain between the student and an experienced co-supervisor – a vacuum is created thus making him behave like 'fish out of water', as Bourdieu suggested, in a social space where "constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate" (ibid, p.14). From this account, reversal of these power relations is traumatising for the novice PhD supervisor:

> *As a new supervisor, you are still supervisor number one, your co-supervisor is supervisor number two so you got to make the key decisions about what happens with your students although you are still under the guidance of more experienced person…you have to manage a number of things: One you have to manage a weak student, you also got to manage a new relationship with another supervisor who has got his own way or her own way of supervising students which may not necessarily agree with how you want things to happen. So, there are lots of things that you must try to manage and that whole process can be a juggling process when managing another supervisor* (Famous).

This supervisor acknowledges the fact that numerous relations in a co-supervision engagement can be challenging for upcoming supervisors. Apparently, nurturing good relationship between the student and the co-supervisor is also important as revealed by this participant

> *I thought that my job was to further some relationship between that new student and I, to explain to the student that he doesn't just depend on me and you must initiate* (Gaja).

The value of the kind of relationship that the neophyte supervisor develops is underscored by this participant.

> *… I believe that there must be a very important trust relationship between the student and the supervisor. And this relationship is to blossom into something that the student understands my expectations and I understand the student's expectations* (Jarem).

From the narratives, the themes that emerged relate to the preliminary experience of a junior PhD supervisor. First, tensions may occur as to how a supervisor should act when they come across a more experienced co-supervisor and a PhD student for the first time. Second, the nature of tensions may arise out of the divergent models of supervision employed by neophyte PhD supervisors and the co-supervisors. Third, a junior PhD supervisor can be trapped at the centre trying to create and sustain relationships between him/herself and other parties. Such accounts provide an opportunity to read the intrapersonal tensions that are often left unsaid as they engage in the journey of doctoral supervision in a supervision triangle.

7.4 Conclusion

Experiences of neophyte supervisors at the onset of their careers as doctoral supervisors is important because they have a bearing on the way they eventually engage in supervision of doctorates. The experiences these people have in terms of individual supervisor's perceptions and the power dynamics inherent in the process of supervision affects their working. Junior doctoral supervisors quickly recognise that there is more to guiding and directing doctoral students than just focusing on the knowledge areas and the pedagogical practices involved in the process.

Engaging in doctoral supervision for the first time cannot be described as a good experience. There are unlimited challenges and sometime inexplicable experiences that new supervisors must contend with, making it a terrifying experience. Cases of being allocated students not up to par academically, managing experienced co-supervisors and doctoral students, limited experience and being young are factors which influence the initial student supervision. Amongst other things, supervision engagements are power bases within which senior supervisors engage in silent manipulation of the inexperienced junior supervisors they co-supervise with. Resultantly, some take credit at the expense of junior supervisors. Hence the making of a supervisor is a trajectory constrained by some of these challenges in the field, which for some, become the basis for learning the rules of the game and foreshadows their future experiences in the field of doctoral supervision. But how are PhD students constituted as they engage in supervision encounter? In Chapter eight, I turn to the nature and type of PhD students who enrol in South African universities, their expectations and how they are prepared to undertake doctorate studies.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mapping out doctoral student backgrounds: tracing the genesis of tensions and contestations in supervision encounters

8.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at providing an understanding of the different types of doctoral students. To some extent, doctoral studies are affected by discourses and contexts in which they happen. In this case, those who enrol for these studies rely on their qualifications and the experience of previous supervision. At the same time, the chapter seeks to explore and understand how doctoral students are constituted as a preparatory measure to engage in doctoral studies that rely on supervision as the main mode of teaching and learning. Thus, it is from this perspective that this chapter is developed. It seeks to answer the following question: *How are PhD candidates prepared for supervision experiences prior to admission into doctoral (PhD) programmes?* The chapter argues that student background/profiles, as previously constructed, shape them in ways that make tensions and contestations in doctoral supervision encounters inevitable. In pursuing this argument, I needed to understand student motivations for enrolling for a PhD, admission criteria, necessary qualifications, levels and areas of preparedness and the possible challenges associated with these levels of preparedness. I identified a series of patterns in relationships with supervisors at masters' level that were critical in helping me understand the current expectations and experiences with their PhD supervisors.

The data in form of excerpts from doctoral students and supervisors revealed that student experience with supervision starts at the masters' level and constitutes the main point of contestation between their initial expectations of experiences at the doctoral level and what

they eventually encounter. These experiences reflect how supervision is organised at the masters' and doctoral level and its potential to generate tensions. In Section 8.2, I highlight the conceptual tools used to unravel students' profiles. Section 8.3 delves into the lives of doctoral students with the aim of unearthing the reasons behind their enrolment for doctoral studies and their levels of preparedness. Section 8.4 pays attention to how candidates are prepared for supervision in doctoral education and in Section 8.5 I discuss whether student supervision experiences are imprinted or negotiable as precursors to doctoral supervision. In the last part of the chapter in Section 8.6, I look at the possibilities and tensions that surround doctoral student identity in transformation from masters to PhD supervision identities prior to concluding the chapter.

I also draw on participant voices to understand what supervisors think the reasons people enrol for doctoral education and how prepared they are for this academic journey. I also capture students' voices to understand what they think and say about their doctoral journeys, but as a form of confidentiality and concealing their identities, I have named them as SPh for PhD student (SPh1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6...).

8.2 Conceptual framework

Given that one's profile can only be outlined based on present and past events and experiences, as illustrated by Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and cultural capital in Chapter three, I refer to the concepts of background and identity as being shaped by theories applied to educational context by Cross and Johnson (2008). It is well documented that many Master of Philosophy students enrol for doctoral level of training with some degree of academic and professional experience, which may be in the form of teaching or learning at various levels plus what was experienced at the hands of their supervisors at masters' level. In

the transition from masters' to the doctoral level of training, students' levels of adjustment and response to this new learning are entirely dependent on their 'pedagogical identities' and 'intellectual fields' (Bernstein, 2000**)** and the concept of 'background', as espoused by (Cross & Johnson, 2008). Background, according to Cross and Johnson is formulated as official, pedagogical, and social domains or critical spaces through which university students operate in pursuit of their academic goals. They explain that:

> The *official field* encompasses aspects related to the shaping or reproduction of the dominant institutional culture (e.g. vision or mission, policies, rules, and guidelines that regulate academic and social life on campus). The *pedagogic field* includes discourses, strategies, inputs, and processes connected to the university's curriculum, teaching and learning activities (i.e. academic culture and practices). We also look at *students' agency/positionality* in campus everyday life that we refer to as *social domain*.... The relations between these domains, which may be compatible or conflicting, give rise to specific student experiences and identities (Cross & Johnson, 2008, p.305).

To explore and understand how doctoral students were initially prepared for doctoral studies, I draw on the concept of social domains. I use the concepts of 'background' and 'student's agency/positionality' interchangeably. Doctoral student background refers to the "skills, abilities, pre-intentional assumptions, attitudes, practices, capacities, stances, perceptions, and actions" (Broekman & Pendlebury, 2002, p.291) and other professional or research experiences that students absorb before and during their masters' programme and form part of their identity which they carry over to the doctoral programme. "The PhD student identity is socially constructed by[their] interactions with other people" (Cross & Johnson, 2008, p.305). These concepts are used to explore student profiles and help to understand their identities as vested in their background and their potential to cause tensions and contestations with their supervisors.

Student agency/positionality is used to trace "intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions and contestations that arises from individual doctoral students' choices and actions and external pressure" (Cross & Johnson, 2008, p.305) (departmental, faculty, institutional). Drawing on these perspectives, I utilise the concept of positionality to investigate how students were prepared to appreciate and engage in open and frank discussions/debates, accept criticisms, and develop adequate levels of self-confidence to defend one's ideas, practices and decisions. This calls for clarification of the role and place of doctoral students in their space and relationships with their supervisors. Are they for instance armed with what Carlson, Portman & Bartlett (2006) describe as research, publications, … service, presentations, and identities as they enrol for a PhD? As a final point, I propose identity transformation as a critical step in doctoral education that should be nurtured by all parties involved.

Finally, I utilise the concept of 'official field' to understand how the environment of doctoral education policies, rules and guidelines regulate the academic and social lives of doctoral candidates and how these practices not only enhance or shape reproduction of the dominant institutional supervision culture (Cross & Johnson, 2008), but also provides the basis for diverse tensions and contestations as student identities take shape.

8.3 Students' biographies and profiles

In this section, I analyse accounts of doctoral students and supervisors as key players in the process of doctoral supervision. This process unveils student backgrounds and profiles as constructed from both educational backgrounds and personal life experiences. In so doing, I outline and examine several themes/issues emerging from the interviews.

(i) Overcoming domination through doctorate – the motives for enrolment

In this study, one of the major questions was: *What sparks pursuit of doctoral studies? Is it the desire to further one's knowledge or the incipient urge to overcome domination?* SPh1 enrolled for a PhD at the Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg for several reasons:

> *A desire to foster my education, improve my life, the most important one as a woman, to uplift myself, to empower myself as a lady, that's the most important. …. the need to empower myself, to set myself to grow higher, to get a better position in life, that's the most important as a woman. I saw it from a feminist perspective, that as a woman, coming from African society, for you to be seen and to be heard, you need to fight for yourself in education, so that is one way I said I have to do my PhD, so that my voice can be heard…. Another thing is that, I knew if I get my education, that is when I can impact other lives, that is when I can be like a role model to other female/ladies, to tell them you know guys you can make it, just keep focus, get this thing done, take your time persevere and improve your life. I think that is the only thing that got me to get involved in this PhD.*

From this account, several motives to enrol for doctoral education are apparent: firstly, the participant points out that attaining a doctorate means improving one's way of life. Secondly, the need to gain self-empowerment, as for her becoming empowered has multiple effects, including role modelling and impacting on those who are powerless in the society. Such reasoning confirms Lamont and Lareau's (1988) view that cultural capital is not only a resource for power and liberation but also an instrument that positions one to compete in a certain arena. However, although some of these experiences seems to echo the participant's

way of upbringing, family experiences and communal expectations of women in her community, they should not be generalised to include all African communities.

SPh 2 did his bachelor's and masters' degrees in one university in Southern Africa. His decision to enrol for a PhD in South Africa on full time basis was partly informed by the need to have qualifications from a foreign country, change the experiences about those who would supervise him and the long duration of doctoral education in his own country:

> *It was after my masters' and some couple of years of teaching experience that I realised that I needed to upgrade. And for me .... given that the very, very few professors (university X in my country) would supervise PhD students. ... I also realised that having all the qualifications from one university, you know…was…wasn't in my best interest. Some variety in terms of educational experiences and institutions. That is why I thought of the University of Johannesburg.*

At the same time:

> *Back home,… there were people who had actually studied their PhDs, some had come from X University, [but] some had come from the the USA, the UK, and they were held in high esteem, by… you know, staff in the institution and you know, they would present, they would present their qualifications and you know we would actually envy them, given the… the enormous respect they were accorded* (a long pause*) and you know sometimes if you went [presented] they said nothing. People* (pause*)… were in the habit of glorifying what they would have said, simply because they had the lofty*

qualifications (sarcastic laughter) *PhD - Dr so and so, Professor so and so you know. So, all those factors contributed to my desire to be like them.*

Doctoral qualifications come with a level of prestige and status. Those without the advanced degree, especially in the academic arena, often feel intimidated and do not enjoy the dynamics of power, dominance, and class, as claimed by this participant and confirmed by Bourdieu's concept of field and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Furthermore, those who obtained their qualifications abroad are highly revered. Thus, doctoral qualifications are symbols of power (identity) and one of the major motivators for enrolling in doctoral education. The effects of power play are felt in the institution as they push those who are powerless to seek higher academic qualification.

Furthering his career in research seems to have been the driving force behind SPh3's enrolment: *'I was interested in a research career… I was interested in a research career, so I prompted myself to… to doing the PhD because it seems to be a part of me'.* This seemingly is rooted in experiences he underwent at masters' level, which might have entrenched his love for knowledge (secondary habitus). Similarly, SPh4's account for enrolment is more to do with the love for knowledge:

What prompted me was the love for books and to want to learn and I like, I've got an inquiring mind, so I like researching so I wanted to grow academically… my colleagues that I…. I cannot mention their names helped me to do that [to make the decision to enrol].

Choosing to enrol for a PhD is also closely linked to people you associate with and how inspiring they are to you, as reported by SPh5 and 6:

> *I have got a colleague … who was doing his PhD, we were together in university … so he was like an inspiration not only him… even other colleagues also were an inspiration because we did our masters' together. So, when he did his PhD, he invited me and said well, 'why don't you also further your studies by doing PhD?' So, I said why not take it. So, it was like my colleagues were an inspiration. We were together in masters', so they were inspiration for me to do my PhD* (SPh5).

> *There were friends who were also doing the PhD. They were always encouraging me because they had better chances for looking for a post for me, for a place to do my doctorate. So, I saw it as wonderful chance to embark on my doctoral studies* (SPh6).

Colleagues can sometimes have a strong social and intellectual influence in decision making. Enrolment for PhD is not always about improving one's economic status (Backhouse, 2010) but also gaining or reserving one's space in a social group (being equal to others or belonging to a group). However, whether the influence we derive from friends can explain our ability to engage in supervision encounters at PhD level remains unknown. Besides, institutional structures, regulations and practices are instrumental in motivating a person to enrol for PhDs, especially if it has influence on their careers within academia:

> *Then where I was working at the university, they were always telling us that if you do not have a doctorate by the year 2017, then your chances of working at the university*

will be very slim. So, I thought twice that the sooner I enrol for a doctorate would be a big advantage to me. That is why I decided to enrol for a doctorate (SPh6).

The need for self-improvement, passion for knowledge, pressure from colleagues and the prestige that comes with attaining PhD qualifications are some of the main reasons why participants enrol for doctoral studies. With such motivation and perhaps the way students interacted with their supervisors in supervision encounters at masters' level may explain why they were prompted to enrol for a doctorate. For instance, one inference emerging from students' accounts is that they had undertaken their masters' degrees and therefore were exposed to and enjoyed effective supervision at that level.

(ii) Admission requirement for enrolment in doctoral education

Those who aspire to enrol for a doctorate are mainly inspired by academic qualifications awarded to them at masters' level. These qualifications are the driving force for admission into the faculty/school of education. But establishing whether these qualifications inform the 'supervisability' of the candidate is difficult. Golde (2000, p.199) claims that even "the most academically capable, most academically successful, most stringently evaluated, and most care-fully selected students in the entire higher education system - doctoral students - are the least likely to complete their chosen academic goals". I venture into student perceptions and beliefs about contemporary symbols of academic success as a precursor to establishing whether academic qualifications shape their interaction and supervision experiences with their respective supervisors.

Admission to doctoral programmes in universities is based on prescribed academic qualifications, work experience and such as a minimum percentage for a previous degree,

dependent on the institution. I sought to establish this aspect as one of the essentials for entrance into a doctoral programme. One participant stated that:

> *For myself I had a cum laude - a distinction, so it was obvious that I would be accepted for the PhD… if they know that you have good marks, they want you because definitely you are a hard-working student* (SPh1).

Another participant remarked:

> *They needed a masters. If a masters [level] was not obtained in South Africa, National Qualification Level 8 as per South African Qualification Authority SAQA [would suffice]). Well because I was joining the Faculty of Education, which is a teaching position, one had to have this experience of classroom practice because I was going to further my studies in the domain of teaching* (SPh2).

Work experience for this candidate was crucial, although the earlier candidate (SPh1) had no work experience. Interestingly, another participant pointed out that *'it is required that you have… I think a 70% for masters… I think I can't remember but I obtained a distinction from my masters* (SPh3) to gain admission. He also pointed out that *'[he] was [also] brave to pursue the course and to deal with the contingencies that arise'*. Thus, the innate feelings of confidence and awareness emerge as underlying, but least considered, qualifications for admission to PhD programmes. SPh4 indicated that:

Yes, it was overall marks of 65%, [there was] no compromise on that, you have to… have, the requirement was 65% which I had, I had 68%, which I thought it was a bit shaky, I had 68% (SPh4).

Another participant also indicated that *'the main one [requirement] basically was masters [degree] …the [other] requirement … some experience…. some work experiences which I think I had, I had about close to 15 years teaching and lecturing* (SPh5). This participant took a study leave to pursue his PhD in South African. SPh6 recalled that:

The main requirement was a masters and one had to have done well to have a two or one as in an overall degree or two, to which I had so… with the entry requirements it was not a major problem because at masters I had done well (SPh6).

Admission requirements to PhD programmes, as documented and emphasized in these accounts are purely academic – a masters' degree. Although issues of work experience and some level of 'bravery or stamina' as indicated by one participant are mentioned, they seem not to be of much concern for PhD candidates and faculties/schools of education. It seems that while students meet these admission requirements, there is a plethora of literature on students abandoning their studies and citing supervision challenges, issues, and experiences (Gardner, 2010). Thus, students' accounts indicate partly that over-emphasis on academic qualifications without considering other non-academic requirements that are implicit in supervision encounters, leaves a gap in the admission procedure.

8.4 Preparation for doctoral education

This section of the study attempts to answer this question: *How adequate are candidates prepared for PhD experiences in the South African context?* Those who undertake PhD journeys must begin with a goal in mind and a clear understanding of their destination in order to succeed (Covey, 1989). I examine the preparations made by doctoral aspirants (apart from academic qualifications) in their bid to undertake doctoral studies that are mainly led by a single supervisor in South African context. In order to undertake doctoral education, PhD aspirants were involved in aspects of preparation, both intrinsic and extrinsic. Emerging from the data were a variety of reactions from the participants about their readiness to undertake a doctorate. SPh2 had made financial preparations:

> *I would say I was prepared because I had done a bit of savings and I had made some enquiries about the availability of bursaries in the institutions that I was keen to go and study. For example, I had heard of the Merit Bursary, the Supervisor Linked Bursary and I had heard of other bursaries…* (SPh2).

Other students seem to enrol with little or no adequate preparation. Although SPh3 had a clear picture of his interest in developing a career in research, he was dismally prepared for the demands of a PhD.

> *I don't think [laughing] I was prepared to do this thing. I think I [was] under prepared. I don't think I had… I don't think I would bluff myself to say that I was adequately prepared. I think the best way to express it is bravery. I felt brave!* (SPh3).

Being brave ordinarily implies high levels of motivation, confidence, courage, and positivity about one's ability to undertake a task or engage in a project. While this is an important aspect in a variety of ways in academia, it seems intellectual preparations are more pertinent for those who hope to enrol for a PhD (Mouton, Boshoff & James, 2015).

Similarly, SPh 6's preparations were deemed inadequate:

> *A very difficult question to answer because financially* (laughing) *I was not well equipped. …. I can say I was a bit prepared but financially, and the workload and so on, these things I was not aware of. So, the most important thing I would rather talk about is the financial side. I was not well prepared for my studies…* (SPh6).

Evidently, some candidates are more prepared to enrol for doctoral studies than other PhD students. Whilst others were well informed about the dynamics of doctoral studies, their preparations were more holistic: *'I was prepared to… a large extent'*. Asked to clarify what it meant to be prepared, SPh4 explained: *'It means mental readiness, emotional readiness, social readiness and academic readiness'*. This candidate understood the dynamics of supervision and the general aspects, challenges and issues that accompany doctoral supervision, where doctoral education involves an individual student working with a single supervisor.

Other academic factors such as research skills, topics and knowledge were mentioned by some of the participants as important aspects of preparation:

I was prepared in terms of my research and everything, but … in terms of looking forward to ….in terms of …. that enthusiasm that energy… it was there at the initial stages… (SPh5).

As indicated earlier, academic qualifications as forms of preparation for admission seem to override any other form of preparation. There is a certain percentage/average grade, for example, above 65% for admission to the university, (those who obtain distinctions are automatic candidates for admission). In most graduate schools, this is reflected in the submission of academic transcripts or their equivalents (as for SAQA in South African context), where these kinds of academic preparation assume that "past academic performance is a valid predictor of future academic performance" (Young & Young, 2010, p.41). Such predictions can be inaccurate given the differences in contexts and approaches used in doctoral learning as opposed to previous forms of learning. The data was an eye-opener because aspects that were non-academic such as work experience, financial abilities and even 'bravery', as suggested by one of the participants, have not been acknowledged as important personal preparations needed for those aspiring to enrol for doctoral education.

8.5 Embracing the journey: are experiences imprinted or negotiable?

The quest to enrol for doctoral studies implies that candidates are willing to work under a person qualified to supervise them and are also prepared to undertake doctoral studies. In this regard, universities have a criterion for admission into doctoral programmes. Based on these requirements, students evaluate themselves by the criteria and apply for doctoral studies. The nature of learning and the general social interaction that compounds masters' and PhD experiences are often overlooked. What seems clear is that "the context for learning will be [stimulating], where education has been historically and institutionally framed to proceed

through intimate interaction and structural dependencies" (Simon, 1995, p.100). Structured knowledge and admission requirements may not be enough to determine the context of learning and individual student and supervisor ability to operate in consonance at PhD level. In this part of the chapter, I reflect on current doctoral student supervision experiences at masters' level and whether these experiences may have had impact on supervision experiences at PhD level.

Supervision at masters' level leading to the doctoral level represents a blend of exciting yet sometimes difficult experiences. Accounts by students about these varied experiences have significantly shaped their supervision experiences at the doctoral level:

> *My supervisor at masters' level, my supervisor was, I will start with the relationship. It was so cordial. It was very cordial, we…. understood each other right from the start but of course at the time I felt I wasn't getting the necessary assistance I needed, this is when the supervisor would take long to provide me with feedback for me to continue with the process. And I remember at one point raising dissatisfaction and it didn't go down well with the supervisor who felt I was pushing her. After realising that, I had just to toe the line. I had to go by her pace, you know, after, after submitting a chapter sometimes it went for a month and I would, I would only go to meet …, you know…what do we call it? Her insistence. She would say that 'I have done your chapter, can you come for a discussion', distressed within myself, wanting to complete and move on* (SPh2).

Cordial relationships, delayed feedback, reluctance to accept criticisms - both direct and indirect are mechanisms that tend to suppress student voices as depicted in this student's

account. Such experiences can go either way, it can produce a humble but less critical student or a critical but agitated student. It also emerged that other students felt that their supervisors were not experienced in their field of studies or were too slow inhibiting the completion of their studies. This compelled them to change their supervisors.

> *I have a history of changing masters' supervisors. I had one supervisor, who was rather slow for my like* [aggressively*] as the supervisor was, was alien and could not provide clarity in terms of the way he wanted to take me, and I realised later that he had not studied in the area I was interested in. … then I moved [to another] advisor… because I was based in another research centre so my boss advised [me] and I shifted to [another supervisor] quickly and I managed to finish on time* (SPh3).

Reasons expressed for changing supervisors as in this case are two-fold: supervisors may seem incompetent as they may have been supervising in areas in which they had not specialised or were experienced. Students tend to look for someone whose habitus, to a certain extent, matches their own. Supervisors' survival in this field is partly limited by inadequate set of ideas and concepts in a particular field (Lamont & Lareau, 1988) to mean that the stock of ideas and concepts acquired from previous encounters. In this case, the student's urge to complete his studies in timely manner required a supervisor with not only speed, but some experience and knowledge specialisation in the student's area of research.

Other students had what they described as 'the best supervision' experiences at masters' level:

I had one of the best supervisions for my masters'. My supervisors were caring, they were promptly there, they were prompt with their feedback, and I had, that is the best supervision I ever had. And they were two, my supervisor and co-supervisor... they gave me…you know, good feedback (SPh4).

From this account, SPh4 was socialised in a different way. Here, quality feedback offered promptly define good supervision practices. Such experiences imply that supervisors care about their students' well-being which help students graduate within the specified timeframe. Intersection of friendship and work for some supervisors also provided some interesting space for supervision experiences at the masters' level. SPh5 observes that:

I think I did not …not have any problem at all. My supervisor was always available and sometimes … when I wanted to do my work even after… after work [after hours]) … after lectures he would even invite me during the weekdays to come to his place so that we continue with my studies. I did not have any problem; he was very cooperative and was very helpful.

These accounts describe a supervision relationship that includes both serious academic work and friendship. Friendship in this account is exploited for the benefit of the student, even though it goes beyond the university to the comfort of the supervisor's home. It is within this kind of relationship that supervision and all that is related to it is done, thus presenting supervision experience as 'cooperative.' Similar accounts of a caring supervisor are provided by SPh6:

The Master's level [my] supervisor would call me, now and again, to supervise me in my studies. He was very hardworking, so every time, I would consult with him whenever I had problems. I would give him… after every chapter he would go over the work. He would tell me where I had to improve. So, I must say, my experiences were good, he was giving me all the support I wanted. He was… giving me all the help that I wanted. And at times he would even give me some books where I could get some information when it comes to research and so on. Because in my country we are limited when it comes to library books. So, he was really supportive (SPh 6).

Students' accounts, as seen above, depicting supervision experiences at masters' level, expose certain aspects: firstly, experiences at masters' level can be construed as both a formal and informal learning process that takes place in or out of the university context. Secondly, during this interaction, both negative and positive experiences provide new meanings, understandings and reactions to different situations depending on the rapport between the participants and the supervisor. Thirdly, students tend to develop a generalised opinion about how supervision should be, regardless of the country, but within the faculties/schools of education in universities. Fourthly, issues of social relationships or friendship in supervision are presented as partly productive or detrimental, dependent on the circumstance, to the process of supervision. Finally, students display different characteristics as some wait to be called on for supervision meetings while others 'harass' their supervisors in a race to finish. In the end, students have a way of coping with the situation because they are determined to complete their studies with a view to enrolling into doctoral programmes.

8.6 Becoming a PhD student: supervision and student identity

The data clearly revealed that PhD students perceived supervision as structured experiences, spanning two to three years. They had their own conceptions and ideas of what their experiences would entail, based on the kind of supervision they had experienced at the masters' level. Initial expectations are shared here about duration of PhD programmes and the inherent supervision experiences.

(i) PhD, a disillusioning experience, or the way to discover knowledge?

From the interviews, several issues emerged that most PhD aspirants conceptualised the doctoral programme as a structured entity undertaken within a particular time frame:

SPh1. *So, I just know that I want to do my PhD and finish in three years and get my qualifications.*

SPh2. *I also expected to finish my PhD programme within two years when I got here.*

SPh3. *I don't know whether it's part of initiation that it will take time, but I find myself still struggling a lot.*

SPh4. *I had gone beyond the completion time of my study; I had gone beyond the completion time of my study.*

SPh5. *Your supervisor sees you through and it takes at most may be 3 years for you to graduate but for some of us I think it is taking a bit longer!*

PhD students are disillusioned by the duration taken to complete their PhDs. Taking into account their expectations and the admission literature, it was thought that the PhD degree would only take up to three years to complete and were surprised that in some cases, students had not completed their PhD programme after more than four years, even though

some South African universities suggested that a doctorate could be complete within two years. As pointed out in Chapter five, at UJ, it takes up to four years to complete a doctorate. At the Wits School of Education, the website offers information on admission requirements but does not specify the duration of the programme. It thus emerges that the guiding principle at the time of enrolment is neither the nature of work that PhD entails, nor the kind of supervision associated with it, but the duration it takes to complete a doctorate.

(ii) Wallowing in the miasma of expectations and stark experiences

Current PhD students envisioned a positive rapport between the kind of supervisors and supervision experiences they would have as soon as they enrolled for their degree. They envisioned PhD supervisors as perfect people, capable of steering them through the programme on time. This is reflected in what I describe as *'narratives of expectations'*: *'... I knew that once I get a good supervisor, I'll just do my work…. I wanted to get my work done, with my supervisors giving me feedback, and I go make the changes and bring back in three weeks, even in two weeks'* (SPh1) while SPh2 was even more particular, *'I had envisioned a situation where I would be given immediate feedback on work that I will have submitted. I expected clear-cut guidelines, clear-cut deadlines within which to submit work and to get feedback'*. Responding to what she dreamt her experience to be like, SPh4, in a very low tone, looking down and shaking her head sideways to imply that something had gone amiss along the way, says; *It meant it needed proper mentoring and I thought I would get the same supervision as the one I had at the masters' level. So, I expected to have the best supervision…. I expected to grow'* (academically and intellectually). Similarly, SPh5 was more resolute about his expectations: *'I had high expectations, I thought it was very smooth once you start the… there's no break, you keep on seeing your supervisor; your supervisor sees you'*. SPh3 was more focused about what he intended to be: *'I thought I was going to be*

a doctor or smarter…. I was going to be a doctor, very smart…. to be accepted fully as a researcher without having to publish many papers. As for SPh6, he expected prompt and promising feedback along with some course work in his area of specialty. He invoked his experiences at masters' level as his lens for the anticipated experiences at PhD level:

> *I was expecting some feedback on quite many things, like feedback on research material and so on. And then, because when I was a masters' student, I was just used to that. So, when I came to this place, I also thought that some lectures [would be] given to us, some information, they would do some research and help us on our research and so on. But to my surprise, I did not meet these things. I didn't know that we would have to work on our own when we are doing these doctoral studies.*

From these accounts, a few things can be isolated that are significant to the understandings of pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities. One, from the admission literature, students are quite aware of the fact that against all obstacles, universities have correctly set the duration of PhD fulltime studies at three years. Two, students are aware about the existence of 'good' and 'bad' supervisors based on their experience at masters' level. Past experiences are instrumental in mapping the present and future supervision experiences. Three, issues of feedback from supervisors, quality and rapidity seem to be central to students' expectations of supervision. Four, in retrospect, there seems to be a departure from student supervision experiences at masters' level to the type of supervision at PhD level about the nature of interaction and levels of support. In the two universities where the study was conducted, students were exposed to a few classes in research design and methodology. However, in their research areas, they were left to work

independently. As pointed out by SPh 6, students seem to be in need of some level of course work.

8.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that student background experiences are instrumental in shaping the tensions and relationships that they encounter with doctoral supervision. In this quest, I isolated some factors that motivated masters' students to enrol for doctoral studies. From the student perspective, the contest against domination depended on 'good' performance at the masters' level leading to admission to doctoral studies. Academic preparations have more to do with student qualifications rather than expected supervision (learning) experiences at the doctoral level. In this regard, levels of preparation among students who end up enrolling for a doctorate varies significantly. Student supervision at masters' level seem to suggest an ideal model of supervision experience, thus seemingly standing in the way of alternative negotiated models of supervision prevalent at PhD level.

Central to the argument presented in the chapter, is the understanding of the kinds of people who enrol for doctoral studies in South African universities in order to guide and explain the kind of thinking that informs supervision experiences at the doctoral level. Thus, there are concerns that students supervised effectively at the masters' level, are not exposed to similar experiences at the PhD level. The data also showed that even those students with 'good' academic grades confessed that they were inadequately prepared for doctoral studies – particularly in contexts where doctoral studies are about one supervisor working with one student. This is counter to the expectations of students to complete their studies on time on one hand and invites supervisors not only to supervise as they advise students on what it

means to be prepared for the doctorate, but also re-contextualise their approaches to supervision to meet the needs of such students. The next chapter pays attention to the competing models of doctoral supervision.

CHAPTER NINE

Competing models of supervision: a call for re-contextualisation

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter, competing models of supervision employed by doctoral supervisors in South African universities are examined. Studies on doctoral supervision in South Africa have not adequately addressed the various motivations behind the models and mediation strategies that supervisors adopt in supervising graduate students (Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011; De Lange, Pillay, & Chikoko, 2011). The prevailing assumption is that supervisors in South African universities employ traditional conventional models, particularly the one-on-one model when supervising doctorates. This has prompted speculations about the quality of graduates being produced in South African universities (Backhouse, 2011; ASSAF, 2010; Mouton, 2007). However, there seems to be limited regard and closer examination of the context within which supervisors interact and the influence it has on the choices they make as a means of teaching doctoral students.

Drawing on PhD supervisors and student voices, the chapter aims at showing how different models express themselves in the supervision process, at times drawing on both internal and external contexts of doctoral supervision and the personal characteristics of both PhD supervisors and students. As the chapter unfolds, it becomes convincingly clear that although the one-on-one model of supervision is dominant, other models such as co-supervision and what I have called the ‘contingent cohort’ model seem to be occupying an important space in the student supervision process. The data also revealed that personal attributes, power, knowledge, and institutional dynamics also play out and gradually determine the model of supervision, despite what seems overtly competing models of supervision.

The chapter maintains that competing models of doctoral supervision are a function of the context within which doctoral supervision takes place. Supervisors engage in activities that are binary in supervision and mentoring when conceptualised in relation to the PhD student's context. Thus, contextual issues were noted as quintessential in determining the nature of training and socialisation to which doctoral students and now current supervisors, were exposed. Although, some models and strategies of supervision are useful to PhD students, others are blatantly constraining and contradictory to previous supervision while studying at masters' degree level. Consequently, some students succumb to the power of supervisors and contemplate dropping out or resolve to change supervisors with the hope of finding one that they feel comfortable enough to work with. The implication for contextual interventions to doctoral supervision is that doctoral education needs not only to be re-contextualised to suit a whole set of students, but to also take cognisance of student and supervisor background as the starting point for re-contextualisation.

In Chapter six, it was apparent that supervisors as doctoral students had varied, stimulating, yet sometimes difficult experiences. Similarly, the current PhD students have had varying but mostly captivating experiences during their studies at masters' level, as reported in Chapter eight. It also emerged that while some supervisors supervised PhD students the way they were supervised, others either deviated completely from their experiences or modified those experiences to engage their students in a progressive way. In this respect, there is a need to follow up and establish how these supervisors train and socialise their students in the South African context and what informs their way of supervision. Thus Section 9.2 pays attention to the conceptual framework adopted in this chapter. Section 9.3 explains why

supervisors adopt certain models of supervision, while Section 9.4 specifically details the competing models and mediation strategies employed by supervisors in South Africa.

9.2 Conceptual framework: determinants of models of doctoral supervision

This chapter draws on the concepts of capital (social and cultural capital) (Bourdieu (1986) and agency (Archer, 1998) as discussed in Chapter three. The concept of social capital is used to explore the internal and external networks that supervisors establish through small and large groups to provide space for doctoral supervision. Social capital refers to "resources based on group membership, relationships, social networks of influence, support, and reciprocity that enable them to achieve mutual goals" (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000, p.1). In this context, concepts of capital encompass resources upon which different forms of teaching and learning are vested. Thus, the supervisor's ability to mobilise students into groups, organise for conferences, seminars, writing retreats, and workshops and motivate students to effectively participate in these sessions constitutes social capital. Using the concept of social capital, I establish that such social spaces, as organised by supervisors, are not only crucial learning spaces but also as De Lange, Pillay and Chikoko (2011) and Burnett (1999) state, reduce solitude among doctoral candidates and supervisors.

I also draw on cultural capital on the supposition that it is gained out of formal learning. Cultural capital is important for effective and successful supervision of doctoral students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). As a form of embodied resource (Bourdieu, 1986), the concept is deployed to explore how supervision invokes different forms of knowledge and experiences to supervise doctorates and how this resource enhances and regulates power play among models of supervision as well as among supervisors and doctoral students.

As a way of managing what is seemingly difficult during the supervision process, I deploy the concept of agency. Archer (1998) and Emanuel Kants' concept of enlightenment is a precursor to agency, that is, "man's … release from his self-incurred tutelage," where tutelage was seen as "man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another," (Biesta & Tedder, 2006, p.4). I used this concept to extract, examine and understand why and how supervisors address issues that emerge from their context of work and cannot be addressed by the prevailing conventions of doctoral supervision in South Africa.

Additionally, the chapter draws from various discourses underpinning doctoral studies; namely, the scholarly, labour market, performativity, and throughput discourses. The scholarly discourse is anchored in the overall goal of doctoral education/degrees as spelt out by the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) that it should "demonstrate high-level research capability and make a significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of a discipline or field" (DoE, 2007, p.29). This traditional view of the doctorate, according to Backhouse (2011), serves two purposes: one, conducting research to produce new knowledge and two, transforming PhD candidates into scholars. Mostly, scholarly discourse emphasises that PhD candidates should be able to work independently, acquire knowledge on their own and conduct research (Backhouse, 2011). The effect is that supervisors hope to produce "certain kinds of disciplined subjects: scholars, researchers, academics, advanced specialist thinkers', fields and subfields (or even cross fields) of established academic knowledge" Grant, 2010, p.105).

The labour market discourse presents doctoral education as a source of highly skilled labour that is critical of a knowledge economy (Nerad, 2010; (Kehm, 2006). This discourse

helps to develop highly qualified people who will find employment in research, industry, and the public sector (Kehm, 2006, p, 67). The context created by this discourse at global scale has resulted in efficient supervision and use of "group supervision, cohort-base seminars and structured research timetables" (Backhouse, 2011, p. 33). Certainly, it is becoming increasingly difficult to supervise postgraduate students without being sensitive to the social and economic setting.

The chapter also draws on the discourse of performativity and accountability in doctoral education. In South Africa, Mouton (2007, p.1078) reports on the government's concerted efforts to enhance "management systems and procedures, supervision, and examination processes in postgraduate studies". Bitzer and Albertyn (2011) report on the government's concern for accountability and throughput rates at doctoral level as important signposts of performance appraisal in the realm of doctoral supervision. This set of discourse is crucial in exploring how supervisors react to the demands of performativity as they engage in the supervision process.

With contradicting discourses, it does not clear how supervisors engage in doctoral supervision. What seems clear, as pointed out in Chapter two, are the one-on-one, the cohort and co-supervision models as the most common models presently used in the South African context. It is not clear whether with these models, a context characterised by the discourses described above, can be confined to either of these models. In other words, it is not clear whether these models of supervision are deployed as originally conceived or supervisors "improve on them" depending on the numerous, idiosyncratic, dynamic, diverse contextual structures to inculcate certain skills and knowledge. What seems to be happening is that these models are applied competitively with little attention being paid on the improvements made,

the people who apply them and how they are applied, thus resulting in a distinctively different nameless model.

9.3 How are the conventional models expressed in the South African environment?

Within the complex environment of doctoral supervision in South Africa, a significant number of students enrol for doctoral studies without having developed a strong identity – capacity to manage doctoral studies - or with minimal clue about what doctoral education entails. Supervisors usually come with a varied and very often conflicting conception and approach to supervision, anchored on their knowledge areas and diverse experiences in supervising doctorates. Consequently, supervision experience is subject to frustration, disappointment, and conflict (in some cases change of supervisors or dropping out). Some faculties in higher education institutions have tried to address this problem via learning contracts between students and their supervisors where their roles and responsibilities are spelt out (University of Johannesburg Faculty of Education, 2015). Whether these agreements enhance good working relationships or not, one thing remains clear: supervision experiences are dependent on models which an individual supervisor adopts and defines in the context of supervision, as will be shown by data in the sub-sections that follow. From the data collected, and the details of students' expectations of their prospective supervisors, I discuss the models and strategies that supervisors employ as they supervise doctoral students.

(i) The Evolution of one-on-one model: a game of language, power, and expertise

One-on-one model of supervision and the supervisors' power and authority is rooted in their knowledge of the discipline at the expense of the new PhD student's individual and

collective agency. This aspect of individuality is used to influence what happens during the supervision process and places the supervisors in a position of someone who knows it all. This is illustrated in the narratives below:

> *When I meet them for the first-time, I don't see them in my office, I go out, I take them out, for perhaps lunch or a cup of tea and just talk about their lives so that I have got a full understanding and then I begin to make assessments if this person belongs to one who is contextually [fitting] to certain approaches* (Famous).

> *I mean the first thing is to help the student get a manageable project…. I find the students work better when they work with something which they are passionate about…. I try to scaffold them, leaving them with easier stuff …. I also teach them how to do a literature search. I didn't do that in the beginning but now I am starting to do that* (Hilda).

> *I still believe in it … PhD is a one-on-one supervision … actual supervision must be individual. I send them to the writing centre* (Leah).

> *So, you have a first meeting where you assess the student … you assess the student. And then the student will send what she wrote, and I will send the student what I wrote… So, so forth… I normally ask students to write me two pages, you know, what do they want to do and why* (Gurus).

As indicated in the narratives, at the onset of supervision experiences, doctoral supervisor practices, and expectations of how supervision ensues is partly determined by what

transpires in their initial meetings with the new students. This is articulated in the many voices that are indicative of supervisor expectations, positions, and expertise. Thus, the expectations that emerge from these narratives ascertain the entrenchment of the one-on-one approach to doctoral supervision. The first set is the paternalistic construct which lays the foundation of one-on-one mode of supervision. From the narratives, the authoritative nature of relationship is first established when a research supervisor isolates a student in specific contexts – offices, cafes, and secluded places for a chat. The second set of constructs relates to supervisor levels of expertise (knowledge and experience) vis-à-vis student abilities. This comes in their initial meetings in the form of demands, assessments, and expectations from what seems to be a needy PhD student. This leads to the third underlying construct: the docile and unchallenging student prevalent in the apprenticeship model of supervision and the powerful supervisor. Here, supervisors, by implication, present students as submissive people who will not necessarily challenge them or the discourse. For instance, they spell out their roles in form of what they do '*I begin to make assessments'.* Another supervisor goes on and says, '*I also teach them… I find the students work better*'… then those whose writing is wanting, '*I send them to the writing centre,'* instead of negotiating a balanced approach to how the process should proceed. Finally, the fourth construct is rooted in the language used by supervisors. The use of the phrase *'I'* in these narratives point at the wielding of power, availability of knowledge and management of a PhD student. These phrases are indicative of deliberate sense of responsibility that the student must perceive as vested in the supervisor as framed at the onset of supervision encounter.

The other issue relates to student background as a foundation for one one-on-one model of supervision. The choice of a supervision model is dependent on the individual doctoral student's ability. For instance, as indicated in Chapter six, some supervisors tend to

supervise students the way they were supervised. Consequently, most of them engage in an apprenticeship model of supervision, as model which has for many years, favoured people who are specialised in a particular field of study (Jemeson & Naidoo, 2007). The one-on-one model, embraced in South Africa, is not only invoked, and cultivated by supervisors' initial encounters with students but also the context within which they operate. For instance, it emerged that variation in models of supervision is a function of the nature and quality of PhD students.

> *I also recognise that there are some students who need my close hand, particularly at the beginning but …. I think in general, because there are weak students, you find that they demand your time, they demand much of your time. Their demands are very high, literally they want to be taken by the hand… so they can be quite demanding in terms of your time, in terms of level of detail, that they are seeking from you in order to guide them in the process, so it can be quite challenging* (Famous).

> *I think it's a combination of background and experience… you know, and history of the student* (Gurus)

> *I don't think I am going to do the changes –I said that is your decision, if you don't want to do it here, we terminate the story here look at me* (Charisma).

> *The most difficult student I have supervised was an academic who thought [that] she knew much more than she knew. She thought she never needed a supervisor. She thought she knew everything. You cannot teach somebody who feels she knows everything* (Hilda).

I would drill them, and you know what, if there is an appointment, you have to make it and keep the rhythm (Gaja).

But I find so many PhD students are not so willing to accept your guidance as a master's students, they would question you, sometimes ignore you (laughing) *thinking it is not important enough, so, in some cases it is more difficult for me. The one student that I currently … I have a situation with, I really have to motivate, and I really have to justify why; I have to justify things. Because she just says she thinks it is not necessary* (Stinka).

Supervisors' reliance on the one-on-one model can be explained in context. From these accounts, student background and academic ability partly inform the supervisor about the model to adopt (in this case, the apprenticeship model). Although this model of supervision has been deployed based on supervisor's expertise and students' disciplinary interests, narratives in this section indicate its deployment in South African contexts helps to handle individual students with weak academic backgrounds or inadequate doctoral student identity. This is ascertained in statements like: *'I think it's also about realising that the students come from different backgrounds and there is no one size fits all for all those students'* (Famous). This confirms the constraints in students' intentions, interpretations of their actions and their world as suggested by Cross and Johnson (2008). Supervisors also handle individual students with diverse personalities. Their challenges, idiosyncratic reactions and beliefs can best be handled in a one-on-one basis rather than any other models of supervision. For example, disobedient PhD students who refuse to take the supervisor advice, as in the case of Charisma and Hilda, prepare supervisors for one-on-one discussions that over

time focus on specific issues, hence its entrenchment in the practice of supervision. In this study, insubordinate doctoral students are those students whose sense of student identity is inadequate and their personal ego, in light of their engagement, leaves them space for contestation and refusal to comply with the supervisor's advice. For instance, the student may feel that they are ready to defend their thesis and graduate, whereas the supervisor may think otherwise, which tends to lead to conflict.

The other contextual issue that calls for one-on-one model of supervision relates to the discipline within which the study is conducted. A particular discipline reveals a certain level of knowledge and therefore a specialty that grants one some degree of power.

> *I won't supervise outside my discipline … So, when I am working outside my comfort zone, I have to work with somebody whose comfort zone it is. So, I won't take somebody who is outside my discipline* (Hilda).

> *I cannot supervise somebody in political studies or somebody in an area that I do not know anything about. I think that would be highly irresponsible because how do you guide a student in terms of what the core literature in the field, how do you guide the student in what is the most important field that you must engage in if you are not fine with that area? So, I would be critical of anybody who say they can in the field that they are not themselves advancing* (Sally).

From these two transcripts, three things are clear about the character of doctoral supervisors in South Africa. First, there is a tendency of residing in the familiar – a comfort zone - which is explicitly explained in terms of working in areas related to the space of

specialisation, expertise, and experience. Second, an incipient feeling of inadequacy in current debates and literature in those other fields discourages them to supervise related areas, even though in many instances, supervisors are compelled to take on work in this area. Third, it motivates supervisors to ground themselves in their respective discipline, supervise and compete fairly in other aspects of supervision, as described in Chapter five.

> *I am a sociologist in education, and I did my PhD on teachers' work on professionalism and over the years I have supervised very different topics. I supervised stuff in assessment, in teaching, stuff in learners, it is not always working, and I spoke about it sometimes, but I think it is becoming much [easier]* (Leah).

In the South African context, most of the experienced supervisors in the faculties/schools of education believe in the apprenticeship model and underscore the difficulties and discomfort prevalent in working beyond their areas of expertise. These findings confirm the entrenched apprenticeship model prevalent in South African universities and the overriding understanding that "values, conventions, and norms governing the processes through which the knowledge [is] conceived and produced" (Parry, 1998, p.273) are themselves deeply rooted in supervisors' ways of supervising, making it difficult for them to apply different or alternative models of supervision.

> *No, no, there's nothing that has changed. The supervision and the research are still discipline-based and is a huge disadvantage, because the discipline you know is a Western … is a Western construction, and it is holding all of us captive and is preventing us from doing proper research* (Gurus).

Gurus, unlike others, states that although supervision is based on disciplines, Western-constructed disciplines, which *'is a huge disadvantage'* because it *'[prevents them] from doing proper research'*. Thus, there is need to work over and across disciplines and break away from the long tradition of working in disciplines as conceived by the West. This supervisor highlights the immense Western influence on the South African curriculum. Their perceptions imply their rootedness in the disciplinary culture and their inability to learn and invite change in supervision approaches. Thus, the contestations between disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches are not only about serving the knowledge economy as advanced by Strober (2011), Winberg (2006) and Gibbons *et al.* (1994) but also about individual supervisor's perceptions of life and knowledge and how it can affect the process of supervision.

The foregoing accounts partly rationalise the entrenchment/dominance of one-on-one model in South African universities. It is, however, critical to listen to students and supervisors as they describe what is experienced in this model as discussed as follows:

a) *One student one supervisor: inside the one-on-one model*

Given that in a one-on-one mode of supervision, individual supervisors take responsibility for their students. As such, supervision consultations take place in offices as some of the students pointed out: *'Normally we meet in his office… I also meet with my supervisor not… not outside that…. and then we meet after I have e-mailed him….'* (SPh5). At times students walk into supervisor's offices to complain: *'remember at one point when things were getting tough for me in terms of duration of the study, I went to see her in her office…'* (SPh2).

Interactions between supervisors and individual PhD students during supervisory consultations, focus on student work and issues affecting the students' progress. Depending on where the student is in the process, discussions could focus on the research proposal, the literature review, the methodology or thesis writing. But as pointed out by SPh2, issues of completion time are also addressed during these meetings. In the narrative that follows, these PhD supervisors provide some detail on how they engage with individual students:

> *The first thing is to help the student get a manageable project, you have to work with the scale, you have to get the questions right, and it has to be something that the student really wants to do and is interested in. I find students' work better when they work with something which they are passionate about. And then once you have gotten the scope and scale you have to give them some guidelines on what really, they can start with, and some readings, sometimes the readings are hard, I try to scaffold them, leaving them with easier stuff …… and then I also teach them how to do a literature search. I didn't do that in the beginning but now I have started doing that. They have to know how to do literature search… their own literature search. … And so, if the questions are right and we know which data we need to answer, and we know that we are filling some gap in available literature, then it is quite easy to work out the research design. And a lot of the time, am very intensively involved in that. …. So, I say to them, ok you your data analysis is really your contribution to knowledge and has to be about two thirds of the thesis. So, we then work out the length of the thesis, we work out two thirds, we work out the data analysis chapters and we divide that into the number of pages of each chapter and then we look at the one third left and we*

divide that into the literature review, the introduction and the methodology. So that is how I do it (Hilda).

So, …. the starting point is an assessment, a mutual assessment and then after that comes clarifying the focus, the topic, the problem, and I normally ask students to write me two pages, you know, what do they want to do and why. And then we just take it from there, and then the topic is negotiated and refined and then the student is sent back to read up and come and tell me what's the gap in literature and then we work from there… (Gurus).

Supervisors in this study, elaborately provide the actual process of supervision, highlighting the key issues that they pay attention to. They engage students at a personal level to ensure that students identify researchable topics, read appropriate literature, figure out the scope of the study and the kind of data required as well as the research designs appropriate for carrying out studies. These participants pay attention to individual students based on the understanding that individual differences influence the way people learn. Their knowledge and experience in research come in as a tool for guiding the needy student. I sought students' opinions on this issue.

In terms of literature, I would say the supervisor exposed me to quite some interesting readings. I remember, when, when we started, I didn't know anything about this (long silence, as if to remember…recall and then speak) *what I could call you know, certain theories but with [some] guidance and recommendations for certain literature, I can now boast of being well versed in certain philosophical theories* (SPh2).

Ok, in my view … my supervisor, sometimes gives me articles that are important, because sometimes I don't know which ones are important, the fact that he comes in to forward some articles, or sometimes he comes in to give me some key names or some key phrases…. Go to the library look for some things, this is important (SPh1)

Observations of this kind reveal the play of power prevalent in different fields of knowledge and the doctoral students. Supervisors' mediation strategies are elaborated by Famous, who though despises individual supervisor working with one student, yields to idiosyncrasies that students require personal attention. This study adds that whereas focusing on the discipline is an important factor in this context, individual student uniqueness imprinted in their backgrounds are critical in determining which mediation strategy is to be adopted.

I think there are a few things that I have learnt, one is that you cannot have a blueprint for supervision that works for all students but there are some students who need to be guided…. by the end in other words they come to your office and you literally have to agree on. … So, you know people come in for supervision differently…. some that need to be guided …. So that's one thing, that there is no single approach that works for all groups … therefore as much as possible you have to find the best way and best processes and approaches that will work for individuals…. as far as I am concerned, it is very important for the supervisor to recognise the fact that individuals come to supervision process with individual characteristics and needs, and failure to recognise those requirements may place some of the students in danger of delayed completion (Famous).

At the same time, initial evaluation of a PhD student and the topic under investigation by a supervisor constitutes an important step in establishing how to supervise a student. Some students concurred with this view and indicated that they preferred situations where supervisors dealt with them individually.

> *You know supervision... I know that supervision is not a mystery but one thing that I believe in is that you hold a person, it is like showing a baby how to walk. I have never seen such people who do not… my last supervisor taught me what the real word, like … scaffolding, how to scaffold a person. To give support structures. Where you give support … for a person to grow, to help and you become, you avail yourself for help* (SPh4).

The nature of the doctoral programme also plays a role in determining mediation strategies adopted.

> *Many people… doctoral students and masters students are doing this on a part-time basis……. So, in my understanding here, I start the process to make the expectations … and then we start and talk about the process in terms of getting the proposal ready, and he/she must read and talk and advice on the topic as well. Because we must get an understanding of what the topic is all about* (Jarem).

In this case, a part-time doctoral programme dictates that PhD students make their own private arrangements, to meet their supervisors without compromising their work/jobs. Averagely, group comparison is vital when deciding on a suitable model of supervision for a PhD student.

(ii) Co-supervising PhDs – showcasing a multiple-edged model

Models adopted by supervisors were also determined by other things beyond the PhD students' background and nature of study. One such model is co-supervision. Narratives from participants revealed some of the reasons that motivate them to engage in co-supervising doctoral students. Their views are discussed in this section.

a) Justifying co-supervision

In reviewing the responses from the interviews, I established that co-supervision, as a pedagogical practice, is beneficial to both PhD supervisors and their students. This study was interested in knowing why supervisors resort to co-supervision:

> *I said you can't do it under me, I will look for a supervisor because I am nervous, and I will find you a supervisor and …. I will be your co-supervisor, so he said 'who?' I said that person but that person left the university and we were nervous and I said I will find you a supervisor so I found one person who was well published at that stage and he became the main promoter and I became the co-promoter but I supervised him on the empirical data* (Charisma).

> *So, what you then want to be able to do is perhaps to make sure that there is some opportunity for co-supervision between somebody from the business area and education area. So that you don't miss out on some of the important things that might be required from each of those disciplines…. So, but then I think there is also the issue that, you tend to be assigned a more experienced supervisor who acts as a co-supervisor* (Famous).

But I also co-supervise. A lot of my work is co-supervision. So, for example I co-supervise with somebody in math, in math field, you know math field, which is not my field. Sometimes you rely on other person's part of knowledge.....it could be a co-supervision arrangement if the topic cuts across disciplines. I am actually saying that a PhD should be more than one supervisor. I think there should be two supervisors for PhD and then it should be the rule. Because I think that PhD requires …. justifies more than one supervisor because you can't be on top of everything you say in the PhD (Leah).

Not with any… anything because as the supervisor if you are not in the...not the e…the expert in one of the field but I do think it will be highly irresponsible for you to say you can supervise a student if you're not set yourself, strict in a specific field and this is why one has a possibility to have a co-supervisor who could fill the gaps where you as a supervisor might be experiencing (Sally).

In my position I did not have one supervisor I have got a co-supervisor too. One is like is in the curriculum department and the other one in educational psychology department. So, despite that, I think when you look at theories, they are interdisciplinary, they can be used in any discipline and they can be adapted. So, I think I don't have a problem at that (SPh5).

But working in a team was difficult because we don't have the same vision, to get everybody's mind into the same in the, not in the field, because my field in higher education is very broad, so the context is higher education, the field could be something else and he was a specialist in the field and I was a specialist in the context,

but in hierarchy in university he was on higher position than I was. [Laughing] *He was a full professor which I am not. So, that in itself brought its own power dynamics to the relationship* (Stinka).

From these excerpts, several themes emerged as to why supervisors engage in co-supervision. First, co-supervision provides for the limitations of the supervision process and supports the dynamics of interdisciplinary topics in research. In this case, a co-supervisor is meant to fill in the *'the gaps where you, as a supervisor might be experiencing'* (Sally). At the same time, a supervisor may *'sometimes rely on the other's knowledge in a co-supervision arrangement'* (Leah). This perspective is crucial for supervisors in that they are engaged in a critical process of knowledge discovery. Second, the interdisciplinary context currently being promoted as the trajectory to follow, provides a rationale for co-supervision. For instance, Leah states that *'co-supervision is essential if the topic cuts across disciplines'* and the fact is, *'you can't be on top of everything'*. Interdisciplinary studies are expected as the nature of research problems inevitably encroach disciplinary boundaries and invite co-supervision. Third, as noted in Chapter six, some supervisors learn how to supervise on the job. In such cases, junior supervisors prefer to be linked with experienced members as they learn and accrue prerequisite skills, and knowledge for supervision. Charisma points out that he was *'nervous'* as a junior supervisor and was compelled to look for an experienced supervisor to mentor him. Learning to supervise with a co-experienced supervisor does not only involve mastering supervision skills and knowledge, as integrated in one's area of expertise, it also involves, learning how to *'make ... key decisions about what happen[s] with your students'* (Famous). Generally, the social nature that is prevalent in a co-supervision arrangement encourages working together and formulating relationships that lead to a specific understanding of one another. These findings single out co-supervision as a training

arrangement where a junior supervisor 'learn[s] the ropes' as s/he works and interacts with a more experienced supervisor.

b) The symbiotic relations in co-supervision: a tripartite school

This study found that learning the 'ropes', as suggested, is not a one-way traffic learning experience. Co-supervision translates into a tripartite school **(**learning from experiences), triangular in nature, where even the most experienced supervisors become supporters or teachers of neophyte supervisors and students as they engage in supervision process.

> *So, what it does I said, co-supervision forum, in the groups that are run particularly for me that is also helpful because I get to see what other students are thinking and ……. I can see what other students are doing and how they are doing it and I get ideas from them on how to supervise* (Leah).

This participant was emphatic on the gains she makes as a budding co-supervisor in learning from experienced supervisors.

> *…the best way to learn how to supervise is to do supervision and initially perhaps working with other supervisors. I have had junior colleagues working with me and you know I… they learn from me and I learn from them* (Gurus).

The interaction between supervisors, whether novice or experienced, is valuable. Hilda reported that she values junior supervisors that she works with and acknowledges that *'I have learnt a lot from other [senior and junior] supervisors.*

Generally, while co-supervision is invoked to address certain contextual issues in the practice of supervision, it is an important approach from which new tools are selected to supplement the existing supervision skills and knowledge. Ideally, learning how supervision is conducted is a function of group membership, relationships (Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000) and social networks formed by participants to learn from others as well as exploit related resource to enhance supervisor success. Thus, co-supervision plays various roles as explained in the following discourse.

(c) Co-supervision: a solution to supervisor attrition

A further reason to consider co-supervision of doctoral students is supervisor attrition.

> *And I do that [co-supervision] for two reasons, you know, sometimes there is co-supervision, sometimes it is not split equally but we had two deaths of supervisors and the students had been left stranded because there was no co-supervisor* (Hilda).

> *I was unlucky I lost my man and who was [my] supervisor and he left, and I could not leave because I was funded here, and I had to follow the funding. I lost a man who had an interest in the area in which my PhD was, and I chose him based on that and because of his career he had to move …… I was left in a desert…* (SPh3).

> *…some supervisors don't want, don't want the idea of co-supervisors. They prefer to go it single-handedly. And I think this has its own challenges. Imagine if a supervisor transfers, if the supervisor transfers, it means you have to transfer with the supervisor or if she relocates to another town, probably you will have to relocate with him/her, or*

you will have to start all over again. If the supervisor dies, chances are that you will have to start all over again because you…unless if there are people prepared to step into [his/her] shoes and continue which is always a challenge (SPh2).

Granted that co-supervision takes the position of filling knowledge deficiencies that a single supervisor may encounter, interview excerpts revealed several other effects experienced in the use of this model. Firstly, professional and social-cultural movements may result in supervisor attrition (getting a new job as suggested by one participant, other discourse underpinning higher education, assignments/commitments out of the country retiring, death and do forth) and unpredictable working relationships can adversely impact on a student's progress. Such eventualities are carefully mitigated by a co-supervisor. Secondly, it seems that the challenge of attrition, as raised by students SPh2 and SPh3's desires for co-supervision as a remedy for unwelcome and unexpected happenings. It seems that in the initial conceptualisation of supervision, some issues such as movement of staff and attrition were not considered when allocating doctoral supervisors. Currently, many more issues need to be considered as the starting points of when allocating a supervisor(s) for a student.

Traditionally, co-supervision has been conducted in a manner that allows supervisors to meet a student independently and give feedback. This arrangement creates constant conflict in feedback and the student becomes the focal point of intersection of tensions, contestations, and contradiction between the two supervisors. As a model of supervision, some supervisors have slowly modified this approach, effecting it with a humane perspective as explained in the following section.

(d) One student two supervisors: towards ethics of obligation

Supervising PhDs does not just involve direct interaction of students and supervisors in offices. Some supervisors blend these meetings with other experiences depending on the skills, knowledge, and aspects of doctoral education they want to teach or better still, two supervisors may meet their PhD student at the same time and give feedback to the student.

Choosing to co-supervise and then jointly provide feedback to a student is an emerging supervision strategy in South African universities. Its origin seems to be grounded in one's ethical obligation to the student he/she encounters. Ethical obligation adopts the kind of interaction in which students are attended to in a humane and caring way as opposed to previous practices where students were often given separate and conflicting feedback from two different supervisors. This supervisor makes an articulate observation.

> *I don't supervise as I was supervised. I had two supervisors who …. They saw me as a production unit, and they had separate ideas on where my studies had to go to. I am supervising, I never supervise alone, for the past number of years, am not willing to supervise alone* (Charisma).

The aforementioned participant found himself in a difficult and vulnerable space that was created by his two supervisors (as a PhD student). Consequently, he does not engage in a co-supervision arrangement where he differs with colleagues in front of a student. It seems that in the co-supervision model, the two supervisors complement each other:

My colleague sees something, and, in that way, we balance each other. We support each other and if we differ, we do not do it in front of the candidate… We try not to differ from each other in front of the candidate (Charisma).

In terms of interaction with the student, Charisma and the co-supervisor work on documents that are submitted by the student in a new and unique way.

Further, if we see a document, we make our comments on, it is not my document, mine, and her document. It is a signed document, so I scrutinise her comments if am a second reader, if am a second reader, she scrutinises my comments and then we differ on those things. But we do it before we see the candidate (Charisma).

To this effect, Charisma, as a supervisor, has over a number of years has

changed [his own way of supervising] from the way [he] was supervised to one in which you work on one document you give feed back to the candidate while both supervisors are present. I don't agree with [the old version that] if I supervise you, you come and see me alone. We don't work that way. When this candidate comes in, the candidate sees two people in unison supervising the candidate (Charisma).

This participant raises other social, ethical, professional, and personal issues that a re-conceptualised co-supervision model attempts to address. Issues of professional misconduct, sexual harassment, personal dignity, and caring for the PhD take the centre stage in this arrangement. Similarly, mediation dynamics in co-supervision arrangements are emphasised by Leah, as she underscores the value of two supervisors meeting a PhD candidate

simultaneously to discuss his/her work. *'Two supervisors meet the student together…at the same time and then I think the meeting must be more regular, I think at least once a month'.* Supervisors are not alone in tracing this kind of strategy, some of the students who are co-supervised attest to this novel approach to supervision:

> *I think each supervisor has got his/her emphasis, isn't it? But I think when I meet with both supervisors, we try to iron it out and come up with a compromise* (SPh5).

The co-supervision model, where students meet supervisors for dual feedback (that is, the act of two supervisors meeting a student to discuss and give feedback instantaneously to the student) is in contrast to the idea of separate feedback which could be contradictory. What emerged from the data is that a supervisor, in a co-supervision arrangement, is largely shaped by the supervisor's prior experience as a PhD student working under two supervisors. By meeting the student in this new fashion, the state of students' solitude is minimised (De Lange, Pillay & Chikoko, 2011; Burnet,1999) and learning takes place in a more social setting. Thus, the sitting arrangement is as depicted in the following diagram.

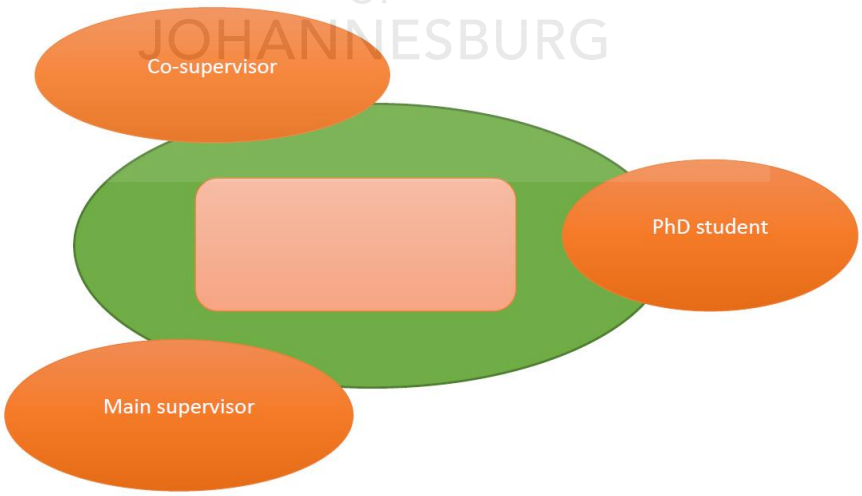

Figure 9.1: A Transformed co-supervision arrangement

Source: Created by the author

(e) Endorsing co-supervision, a power, institutional and personal issue

Co-supervision, as discussed in this chapter, is cost effective and serves virtually multiple roles in the supervision triangle, that is, to the student, supervisor(s), institution, and knowledge. However, the fact that one-on-one way of supervision is common in South African universities (ASSAf, 2010; Backhouse 2009) supervisors, departments and faculties are not in favour of this model citing personal, contextual, and institutional constraints as hindrance to total endorsement of this model. In other words:

> *we don't have really good models of co-supervision at Wits School of Education…. It's more time consuming [and] therefore more expensive … Feels safer than to have only one person with full responsibility* (Hilda).

> *Perhaps, if there is a culture of teamwork in the department, then, then probably it will work. But we also have challenges supervisors and co-supervisors that some co-supervisors will not adhere to the study, to that the supervisors sometimes, the supervisor does not share information with the co-supervisor. There are challenges if you don't have that spirit of teamwork, then you'll find the supervisor and co-supervisor could be… in conflict with each other because one will not be in favour of a particular view point or approach and the other has a different approach and there could be that kind of problem. So, what is important is that there must be a very deep understanding between the co-supervisor and the supervisor. When you say deep understanding, you must be very clear about what deep understanding mean* [Famous].

A deep understanding of the participant in a co-supervision arrangement means to some, a well-developed social relationship that is coupled with well-built knowledge in research. However, personal knowledge areas and pedagogical issues, as pointed out in these excerpts, make it difficult for co-supervision to override the apprenticeship model of supervision. Although these factors determine the reluctance to fully endorse this model, the prevalence of supervision, as a mode of teaching, portends power in the hands of supervisors and those above them.

> *One thing that I must mention to you is we are in the performance-based culture at the moment, at this university and also the country. It is like asking someone to…. you know what the score of your course can have i.e. 82… and [someone says] I want you to meet 90 in two years' time. So, it is alright I'll give you 90, but you clearly know what you can get. So, yes, we can easily get to 100 but you know what you can get, that is my comment. It doesn't get there automatically, there is a lot of things involved. I used to have a colleague and he can actually summarize the best for you on the following. It is the policy and how we are going to do it. You know the policy might be there may actually be aspirational, and we can easily get there, and we are not really there* (Gaja).

Thus, the importance of performativity, as pointed out in Chapters one and five of this study, cannot be overestimated. Performativity determines the model by centrally placing a premium on what is expected of the supervisors in a model of supervision. In the South African setting, management systems and the issue of accountability and throughput initiated by the government (Bitzer & Albertyn, 2011; Mouton 2007), supersede institutional practice of doctoral supervision and are vital signboards of performance appraisal. The work of

Bourdieu (1986) shows beyond doubt how various domains of power influence pedagogical practices at various levels as they discourage or entrench others.

(iii) ***Contingent semi-cohort model of supervision: an emerging blend***

Supervisors in South Africa also function in new arrangement where students both doctoral and masters' are exposed to some form of course work as they work with their supervisors in building the various aspects of their studies and research – research proposals, chapters related to literature, research methodology chapters, data analysis as well as presentation and interpretation of data and findings. Supervisors, with diverse experience, participate and encourage students to tap into their varied abilities, during their doctoral studies and attend all workshops or course sessions regardless of different topics, and also prepare to present sections of their work before peers, friends and academic staff members for feedback. This model is a departure from the ordinary cohort model in which participating students start the programme at the same time and progress as a cluster through workshops to the completion of their PhDs (ASSAF, 2010).

In this section, I draw on the voices of PhD supervisors and students who engage in this exercise. This is what I call a *contingent semi-cohort model of supervision* as it includes both PhD, masters'and at times, honour's students.

> *We use a double system here; we have a cohort system [and] it's not really a cohort. They don't all start at the same time. We run a research course that students have to do. And that research course is taking them through the research process, so the first quarter is for them to understand and define the topic.… So, there is a system of them working with their classes as a whole, whoever has to be a research student at the*

time, and I think I got that from (university x). There is always a research group and then I work individually. But I have always encouraged them, you see in the research weekend, they find each other (Hilda).

…. In addition to that there could be a PhD weekend, where all the students meet together and present to each other in addition to the regular meetings between the supervisors and the students only …. I want to think about the ideas that other students are doing. You get to see the kind of questions that have been asked. How people are framing those questions, how people…what they are reading, all of that together helps (Leah).

Yes, like group supervision. It's a better way to work because it encourages students to work together. … I normally have students who share a topic and then some students are further down the line than others so it's good to have the diversity (Gurus).

I think that is for personal professional growth that is what I believe. Personal professional growth in the sense that I believe like going through that way by interacting with other members of the academia I grow (SPh3).

I can't say it is always regular that he organises every time after every fortnight, sometimes it is not regular sometimes irregular sometimes every fortnight, sometimes after a month, so it is irregular, I can't say it is regular…. … it has an influence both on my work and on his work …. So, I can say…we say it helps us as …as well as the supervisor [and]… as his students because we don't …I don't attend alone as all

students who he supervises attend, so it helps us and also him as he supervises, so it helps us and also him as a supervisor…. So, it benefits both of us, I have learned the craft from other colleagues through peer presentations. I have learned that technique, I have also learned from my supervisor (SPh5).

Interaction, as reflected in these narratives presents supervision as a kind of socialisation that brings together supervisors (experienced and inexperienced) and postgraduate students - honour's, masters' and doctoral - to socialise in academic space, thus bridging the academic gap among the attendants. Bridging in this case refers to "relationships amongst people who are dissimilar in a demonstrable fashion, such as age, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity and education" (Hawkins & Maurer, 2009). It reflects on supervisor ability to bring together a blend of postgraduate students and allow them to freely share their educational experiences with their colleagues of varied calibre.

It also leads to scholarly and thought-provoking discussions that revolve around research and areas of research that students are investigating. More important is that students operate in their own groups, comprising masters' and doctoral students. This operation among students themselves aligns with Putnam's (2001) view of bonding which refers to a situation where members of a community, that hold similar status like themselves, relate with each other in handling a specific academic issue. All these students eventually meet individually with their own supervisors to deliberate and decide on issues arising from the diverse groupings. Meetings with individual personal academic supervisors is vested in the belief that the supervisors will dispel and discuss issues raised in group discussions. In this case, the linking aspect of social capital, which relates to the association that exist between individuals or institutions have power over the student, that is, power to provide dependable feedback

(Szreter & Woolcock, 2004; Woolcock, 2001). This facilitates the union of those in power and the powerless. The *contingent semi-cohort model* draws from one-on-one, the cohort, and the co-supervision models, as discussed in Chapter two.

This approach serves other significant aspects of doctoral education such as creating space for argumentation/disputation, initiating students into the contested world of academics and knowledge creation, and subjecting them to the power struggles that characterise knowledge creation and supervision experiences. Other 'bonus' skills, such as development of interpersonal and presentation skills, building self-confidence and establishing networks, are developed. Essentially, all the activities pointed out by participants - group meetings, presentation of students work, presence of supervisors, drawing of students from different year groups - constitutes the basic strategies that aim at building communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) at faculty and departmental levels.

In this study, the data revealed that not all supervisors engage in this kind of supervision. Most of the supervisors engage in the contingent semi-cohort model on a voluntary basis, while others engage students in these experiences by drawing on their own experiences as former PhD students. As highlighted in Chapter two, drawing from different groups of students lays the foundation of building a community of scholars and reduces the high levels of isolation associated with doctoral studies (Burnett, 1999).

(iv) ***Can doctoral committee models work in South African context?***

Doctoral committees are gradually being incorporated in the doctoral supervision process in some South African universities. As pointed out in this thesis, a PhD committee, as used at the University of Johannesburg, is an opportunity created for doctoral students to

receive scientific and personal support from an expert committee. It is formed by a main supervisor, a member from the department and the Faculty of Education. In this study, I sought to establish how this model is applied in some of the universities. Different factors determine operations and functions of doctoral committees. With reference to its organisation as a model of supervision, one participant noted that *'I like, I like the way in which it's now organised that is a facilitating structure, so I am satisfied with that'* (Charisma). As for its constitution, another participant finds it problematic, *'I have had problems with the committees, to select is a problem….to select them is a problem…'* (Jarem). The challenge of constituting committees is that either some supervisors are not willing to work on these committees or are overwhelmed, *'there is a meeting of the committee, but I haven't heard one in which all committee members were in'* (Charisma). This seeming lack of commitment is more succinctly articulated by this participant. *'People are not prepared to do this thing because it is a voluntarily thing'* (Jarem). Reinforcing this view, a surprised student noted:

> *You will be shocked that some of the PhD committee members don't know the student who they belong to… who is in doctoral committee. They don't, they are just told, Mazibuko is a student and Mazibuko this is your doctoral committee and the doctoral committee doesn't know you!* (SPh5).

For other students, having been at UJ for five years, they have no idea about members of their committee, yet their proposals were procedurally taken through these committees. Apparently, PhD committee are constituted as structures meant to oversee processes and assist the main supervisor and the doctoral candidate in terms of quality and a variety of experiences. When I asked these participants to comment on their experiences with the PhD committee, this is how they reacted.

The PhD committee… there is not much I know about it. The only thing I see about this committee is that when you forward your proposal, the committee is responsible for reading it. In fact, I haven't met this committee so, I don't know much about this committee (SPh6).

I don't even know… what the thing is, I don't know their aim. I don't know if their aim is to, may be check whether the topic is researchable if it's that then there is a basis for them to be… in place, to check if what you are doing is relevant (SPh1).

Three things are emerged from the data. Firstly, as doctoral candidates, students have not made any effort to access faculty policy and regulations governing procedures in doctoral education. Secondly, they may have been admitted to a doctoral programme, had their proposals submitted to the PhD committee, which was introduced at UJ. Thirdly, their academic identity is fixed in certain ways of doing their doctoral research, thus limiting their curiosity to explore what PhD committees envisage.

Some supervisors differentiate the roles they play in the process of supervision and within the various models: *'when I'm a supervisor, I'm in charge, I'm accountable, and so I call the shots. But when I'm serving on another [PhD]committee, then I just contribute, and the supervisor makes the decision* (Gurus).' Participants acknowledge that views offered by the committee are subject to the supervisor's ratification.

It was so … some people will tell you this topic does not make sense, what are you talking about, but the good thing is that I got support from my supervisor… [He would

say] don't mind what those people are saying. People will air their own views but don't focus on those views, just focus on your work and be positive (SPh1).

Sometimes you are called for a PhD committee meeting and when you get there you find that they are discussing a particular student, this supervisor of a particular student is the one who dominates and what they believe in is what carries the day (SPh2).

Yet some supervisors and students allege that PhD committees in the department have become formalities that hardly impact on student or supervisor development.

The doctoral committee is selected…. and managed by the supervisor…. I would say that nowadays, people, I often get invitations, would you serve on that doctoral committee and then I write back and say, 'what does it entail?' 'The only thing I expect from you is to read this proposal and to sign. And then later on you present on seminar review'. ... The doctoral committee is not providing all the support in respect of shaping the supervisor and also shaping the student. [It] is not playing any role in that respect [the affective dimension]. Doctoral committee nowadays is almost a rubber check, rubber check, where it says have the doctoral committee approved. Yes, ok …. There is no real development. There is no real shaping of the student or the supervisor (Gaja)

One student agrees with these views and points out that the role of PhD committees has been negated with regard to what they are doing and what they ought to do. His account suggests an expanded role, beyond what he describes as rubber-stamping.

So, for me a PhD committee should be discussing issues of supervision, how it should be done to be effective and the students' welfare, while at the university. But these issues don't seem to be tackled at all. PhD committees seem to be for me organs that define the status quo - that is rubber stamping (SPh2).

From these accounts, it seems that the PhD committee model is not well rooted or implemented in faculties/schools of education in South African universities. Unlike other models, this model is not implemented because of inadequate interest from committee members, overloaded/worked supervisors, lack of preparation and the already overriding understanding that the students' supervisor *'call[s] the shots'* that is, has the final say on the committee. In other words, the perceived contributions of committee members are contextually censored by the main supervisor. This contradicts Petre and Rugg's (2011) assertion that key decisions affecting student progress are "ratified in the formal meetings with the committee" (p.27). Seemingly, the operation of the PhD committee is hinged on the context of constitution, the interest and workload members have at hand. Ultimately, inadequate preparations for PhD committee seminars, undermines the supervisors' moral and intellectual obligations, reducing the committees' role to that of rubber-stamping what may not necessarily be an inspiring piece of work in the South African context. While placing emphasis on this model, it does not consider that some students, even after having been on campus for more than four years, may not know the roles or understand the function of the PhD committee as an avenue for supervision. There are some indications that its mandate should be expanded to include issues of student welfare and facilitate supervisor development.

But why are such observations about this model emerging? From these account, chances of current supervisors (and even students) having gone through such a model or being socialised in any way to function, cannot be remotely sensed. Also, it seems that the model is part of the university structures that may be serving other administrative units than academics, silently understood by supervisors, who then participate to meet the administrative rather than academic needs of students and supervisors.

9.4 Mediation strategies: beyond conventional models of supervision

Depending on the model of supervision utilised in the supervision encounter, a variety of strategies are used to supervise doctoral students. In this study, supervision engagements took different forms depending on the model supervisors adopted, thus providing diverse learning spaces and experiences. These modes seek to facilitate the integration of issues arising from different discourses of doctoral education, as pointed out at the introductory part of this chapter, and adequately addressed in Chapter four. I address some of these modes of supervision, as captured from the data.

(i) Conferences as supervision strategies

Conferences characterise a community of practice in which students eventually gain membership and constitute powerful resources for supervisors to utilise. Attendance and presentation at conferences has the ability to impart certain skills, knowledge, dispositions, and attitudes among doctoral students. In most faculties, including the two cases (school and faculty of education) for this study, an emerging trend is that most supervisors, depending on their own experiences and availability of financial resources, take and encourage their students to attend academic conferences. In some cases, students participate in collaborative

projects where students travel overseas and work in collaborating university for a specified period, as reflected in these accounts.

> *Am taking my people [PhD students] … for two or three years to be covered part of their [PhD] life. I persuade them without a single cent to travel overseas. I systematically present the papers and that kind of thing because there is a strong interaction during those times* (Charisma).

I learnt that commitment to this kind of strategy is driven by some supervisors who were not exposed to such opportunities and over time, the context has taught them its effectiveness as a supervision tool.

> *They have to be encouraged to participate in conferences… you know, those are things that we ourselves as PhD students were not quite exposed to* (Famous).

As pointed out, this forum is central when imparting academic writing skills. For others, it is a strategy for supervising postgraduate students. It serves numerous pedagogical intents that cannot be ignored.

> *I have always, even when I was much younger, I have always managed to take my students with me to national and international conferences…. I have gone there for conferences very often. …. you should be going to the conferences with your students and introducing them to other people to establish their network and your students should be going to conferences. That is where they going to meet their peers. That is when they will finish their PhD with their own network. Don't stop your students from*

attending conferences; you are not just getting people to write a thesis; you are training them to be academics….it has changed for the better. Africa has changed because we are no longer just supervising a thesis, you are developing researchers ok, who have to be able to disseminate the knowledge to have to be able to write… who have to be able to teach, you know you are training academics and researchers (Hilda).

Some supervisors encourage and support their students to prepare for and attend conferences. Leah has not always been able to raise funds to travel with her students to conferences.

As going to conferences with students, a lot of my students are part time, and, in my experience, the very strong students just organize to go for conferences, and I help them to prepare for conferences whether it is the presentation of papers and so on. So that goes hand in hand with supervision.

Although conferences, as supervision spaces, play a crucial role in initiating junior researchers into communities of practice, it emerged that not all supervisors attend conferences with their students. But the few students who either, by themselves or with supervisor support, have managed to attend conferences, attest to their effectiveness as crucial mediation spaces.

I have attended conferences in Zimbabwe, one conference in Zimbabwe [and I] found it very helpful to attend these conferences…when you have presented your paper the comments that they give to you are of great value and at the same time when you look

at others present their papers, the difference that you see you can just measure yourself and find that [you] have not attained the required level [as] the presenters are in the area… Some have already finished. Some are working on their masters', some are professors, some are doctors and when you see those who have already completed and when they give their presentation you tend to emulate them and so on. So, by emulating them you will be raising your standard. So, I think it is better to attend these conferences. You begin to compare yourself with some of these presenters, then the moment you see where you are not performing very well you try to upgrade yourself and do more research and so on. So, these workshops, conferences have really been helpful (SPh6).

I have attended to date, I think four; two local and two international (conferences) … and I think …. my publishing also enabled me to attend conferences and I benefitted immensely from these conferences… In conferences, you get to interact with reputable researchers … scholars. If you have work that is awaiting publication, you actually take, take the work for conferences and you get advice from seasoned scholars. For example, I have also learnt a lot from interacting with international, international representative …. international audience at international level you know, and someone actually helped me shape my presentation skills in conferences... You get to learn how theories intersect with practice. You also get to know…. you get to witness application of theory to practical presentation. You get to learn a lot about research (SPh2).

I have not been to international conferences, I have attended a few locally, and I attend whenever it is possible (SPh3).

I have attended one that was this on this campus and was facilitated by my supervisor. I think it was in 2008 (SPh4).

SPh4, a student who changed supervisors more than three times, found it difficult to express contributions made by conference attendance to her doctoral studies.

Yes, locally I have the writers' association and it was quite an eye opener, native from other countries… It has really helped me and the other one which I attended; was another conference which was held here at the University of Johannesburg. We had facilitators from the U.S.A. They came, and we had a conference together and…and we were talking about reading. So, really, I think it helped. That interaction helped of course, with so many [things] in terms of language (SPh5).

Conferences provide supervision spaces where students are

(i) exposed to peers (Masters/PhD/post-doctoral students and newly graduated students) from other parts of the country/world,

(ii) access intellectual support from highly experienced supervisors/researchers and academics,

(iii) gain skills and knowledge on how to prepare and present academic papers, establish durable academic and social networks and,

(iv) are exposed to the dynamics of practice that sustain communities.

Furthermore, doctoral students assess themselves and their work against their peers as they learn and experience the nature of knowledge dissemination. This is vital as Backhouse (2011) observes that doctoral education goes beyond research work to acquisition of

knowledge on their own and conducting research. It is also instrumental in the production of original academic knowledge (DoE, 2007).

(ii) Questioning, reading, writing for discussion

A selected method of teaching is often linked to particular skills, knowledge and dispositions a supervisor intends to inculcate; for instance, the value of developing critical thinking and academic writing skills is crucial from the supervisors' point of view. In this respect, participants expressed ways in which they imparted skills, knowledge and dispositions about critical thinking and academic writing.

On critical thinking, participants reacted as follows: *'I do the critical thinking part …in my feedback on chapters. I'll ask questions to broaden the perspective and to get students to question the assumptions and to make links with [some of] the issues'* (Gurus). Another participant concurs; '*I usually do that by asking them [some] questions',* but she also gives an option: *'or giving them something to go and read that will help them - that will push them a little bit.'* Others use the disciplinary setting as the starting point to impart critical thinking skills.

> *Now I think critical thinking skills comes from learning the discipline. [I encourage them to] …for example, to read the area of sociology that you need…in it is in the field of sociology so that you understand what the debate is and the way the debate evolved over time and then you will be able to position yourself to become critical* (Leah).

Students are also encouraged to read, write and submit their work for discussion, which forms the basis for inculcating critical thinking skills: *'you write it, you discuss it, you*

show them where the challenges are and eventually you've got the language, you've gotten the technical details in which it will assist you that you will not forget about' (Charisma).

Other supervisors think of critical thinking skills as advanced skills, needing special instruction. Apparently, they hardly impart these skills directly.

> *So [I] don't teach critical thinking, but we require them [students] to think critically. And I think there is a problem there and that is one of the things that course work might … address* (Famous).

Unlike other forms of teaching, critical thinking skills are deeply embedded in pedagogies of doctoral supervision. Questioning and readings of debates in certain disciplines or lines of thinking constitute powerful means of transmitting these skills. These strategies are invoked at individual level, in a situation like South Africa, where doctoral course work has not been introduced. Thus, supervisors deal with each student based on his/her abilities in areas of research.

(iii) Writing centres and retreats – exploiting support structures

Few supervisors pay attention to the teaching academic writing at the PhD level because it is assumed writings skills should have been well developed at masters' or honour's levels. However, others opt to use support structures established by universities, such as the Writing Centres at UJ and WSoE to help doctoral students develop academic writing skills. These centres expose students to a variety of writing skills, styles, and samples of academic writing.

> *Writing I don't teach… I send students to their writing centres. And if the writing is not good, I tell them to go to the writing centre. … So, they have to look after*

themselves and learning to write happens at the masters' level not PhD level. PhD, we should already be knowing how to write (Gurus).

Now writing skills, I don't know, I am a second language and I still struggle with writing. … I send them to the writing centre, but I think that I…my comments are usually very… I am not just giving a broader comment; I give small comments as I go along, and I think that might help people in writing (Leah).

In addition to sending students to the writing centre, this supervisor makes comments on student work that are intended to correct and stimulate revision of academic writing. However, the participant acknowledges difficulties prevalent in academic writing and like other participant, sends the students to the writing centre to assist in the development of academic writing.

In the recent past, writing retreats have become regular occurrences in doctoral supervision in South African universities. Doctoral students go to quiet places for extended periods to work on their doctoral writing with guidance from writing specialists, which offers them the required time and space for thought and making the much-needed progress in their writing.

9.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the protocols involved in the process of supervision at doctoral level. Attention was paid to the models of supervision adopted in the South African context and the diverse strategies invoked by supervisors as they engage with their PhD students. The chapter attempted to validate each of these models of supervision, by

underlining the role of context in the choice of models or strategies supervisors implemented. Justification of the effort undertaken was based on cultural capital theory, which relied on habitus, social and cultural capital to provide an understanding of the dynamics of doctoral supervision. In effect, the chapter maintained that competing models of doctoral supervision in South African universities are a wakeup call for re-contextualisation of supervision. Re-contextualisation of supervision is underpinned by the view that supervisors, in addition to formal engagement with their students, should include other issues pertaining to mentoring and financing that directly impact on students' academic lives. Drawing from the study, the chapter illustrated how different factors influenced the model supervisors adopted. For instance, it showed that some models, such as co-supervision, not only serve the students but also try to induct new supervisors into the process of supervision. Beyond these models, strategies such as questioning, writing centres, retreats and conferences are used to impart certain strategies and critical thinking skills during the supervision encounter.

The chapter also focused on new mediation strategies invoked by supervisors. The data revealed that strategies were determined by the context within which the supervisor operated. In this case, issues such as student abilities, background, the stage at which the student is at PhD level (proposal writing, data analysis and so forth) the specific skills and knowledge to be imparted, the way a supervisor was trained (supervised at PhD), were crucial in determining the strategies adopted. With such contextual considerations, re-contextualisation of doctoral supervision to meet very specific needs in this region, is inevitable. However, as pointed out in Chapter eight, depending on how doctoral students were supervised at the masters' level, the models and approaches to supervision adopted can still be problematic, prompting students either to change supervisors or proceed to the end because they have gone too far and cannot drop out.

In the next chapter, I specifically focus on the tensions, contestations, and other dynamics that characterise doctoral supervision and the effect they have on students and supervisors during and after their doctoral studies – particularly, those who endure until they complete their degree.

CHAPTER TEN

In between them: inside stories between PhD students and their supervisors

10.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the relationship dynamics that occur in the context of doctoral supervision. It attempts to bring to the forefront the actions, and reactions that evoke diverse emotions between doctoral students and their supervisors during the supervision process. It isolates some of the sources of contestation and tension and their effect on supervisors, students, and at times department/divisions and the knowledge to be produced (the thesis). The chapter aims at identifying and describing some of the most contested and contradicting issues experienced during supervision encounters in the South African context. It points out that doctoral supervision encounters tend to be filled with conflicting emotions such as excitement, enthusiasm, pleasure, anxiety, doubt, and frustration. The central question addressed in this chapter is: *How does the nature, causes, and effects of tensions and contests between PhD students and their supervisors' impact on the general supervision relationship and context?*

I argue that contestations and tensions that characterise supervision are inherent in both personal and institutional context within which PhD students and supervisors operate. These contestations are critical not only in determining the pace and process of supervision, but also clarifying the structures, rules, practices, and regulations that govern the process of supervision. Critical here is the way supervisors deal with their students and how the approach is influenced by their background, experience, intersecting contexts, and rank. Similarly, how

students react or behave as they interact with their supervisors is a function of their aims, expectations, beliefs, (their former and emerging identities) and the context within which supervision takes place. Reactions to certain issues by both parties is influenced partly by previous supervision experience, profiles, and prospects. Section 10.2 presents the conceptual framework of the chapter, and then Section 10.3 pays attention to supervision experiences and the intersecting context. Section 10.4 focuses on the context of supervision encounters. I conclude the chapter in Section 10.5.

10.2 Conceptual framework

Discussions in this chapter allude to concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and field. In the context of this study, habitus is conceived as a generative schema in which forms of basic social structures evolve, through the process of socialisation, and are integrated in individuals, which makes them function or act in such a way that "the underlying structures are reproduced and given effect" (Nash, 1999, p.177). In this case, the individual supervisor or students are constituted in such a way that they have their own set of expectations and understandings based on past experiences (Baker & Brown, 2008), but at times devoid of personal and prevailing environments. I utilise this concept to describe and understand issues of relationships, time, expectations, meetings, with supervisors and reactions to different pedagogical issues during supervision.

I utilised cultural capital to elaborate and understand how individual supervisor competence is not only used to enhance pedagogic transmission (teaching) at the doctoral level but also in terms of qualitative differences in *forms* of consciousness *within* different social groups (class fractions rather than class in themselves); that is, in terms of *habitus* as a specialisation ('cultivation') of consciousness and a recognised mastery of some technique(s)"

(Moore, 2008, p.102). The concept is used to show how supervisors, as experts, navigate contestations and tensions between students by not only invoking quality and standards but also what is thought to be professional in a supervision setting. Thus, since cultural capital lies at the core of supervision, it is also used to isolate some of the knowledge and pedagogical issues that lead to tensions and conflicts. One is compelled to develop a pre-disposition to change one's habitus, which takes some time but leads to an improved supervisor and a good student.

The chapter also draws on the concept of field - used here as an *intellectual field* - to describe, discuss and explain some of the power dynamics that emerge during supervision. From this standpoint, supervision is perceived as a competitive arena "in which people express and reproduce their dispositions and where they compete for different kinds of capital" (Gaventa, 2003, p.6). In deploying this concept, I hope to understand how tensions, built by departmental rules and regulations are enforced, disciplinary practices enacted, and how doctoral students and supervisors respond to rules and regulations provided by the department.

In practice, doctoral supervision goes beyond the production of a thesis to the relationship dynamics involved in the specifics of pedagogies of doctoral supervision (that is, participants and their roles) and issues surrounding the process and the beneficiaries (Thomson, 2008). In this respect, both students and supervisors have their own expectations of each other beyond the formal institutional provisions. Based on these expectations, the relationship between supervisor and the student determines the pace, dialogue, and levels of progress of either party. Participants must learn the functionality of each side in order to provide some contextual aspects upon which supervision rests in South African universities.

10.3 Supervision experiences and the intersecting context of doctoral learning

This section draws from other discourses underpinning doctoral studies in the realm of contextual issues that govern the supervision process. These scholarly discourses include institution (department/faculty), disciplinary vs interdisciplinary, quality assurance, mass production of doctorates, global rankings, knowledge economy, the nature of PhD students and doctoral programmes. The scholarly discourse also interfaces with literature on peers, friends, family, and other social or even academic networks, contextual issues identified by Backhouse (2009) and McAlpine & Norton (2006) in their respective models of doctoral education, which shapes the business of doctoral supervision.

In her study, *Doctoral education in South Africa: models, pedagogies and student experiences* Backhouse (2009) formulated the intersecting model in which the family, the disciplines, academic department, workplace and other factors formed the main contextual issues that influence doctoral education, with the PhD candidate located at the point of intersection of these contexts (at the centre). The interesting attribute is that context intervenes either simultaneously or at will during the life of a doctoral student. Although this model looked at doctoral education in general, its application to finer and specific aspects such as supervision cannot be used to analyse the environment of interaction between PhD supervisors and their students. In this case, the logic of intersecting context applied in this chapter is to understand the tensions between doctoral students and their supervisors in supervision context. Vital to this context is the variation that follows the interchange between those involved in the supervision encounter. At times, supervisors will pursue academic issues as their student pursues other issues such as involving peers, family or workplace which present a difference in context, causing conflicts in their encounter.

Supervision experiences are products of the interplay of doctoral students and supervisors, their past (background and identities) and the specifics of the context within which they operate. In this chapter, supervisors and students are located at the centre of supervision experiences. Within them, various factors related to their background, profiles, and educational experiences are placed in the context of the department, disciplines, and teaching/training experiences at the doctoral level. They are constructed differently and their reactions/responses during supervision depend on their past experiences. Working in the department exposes them to a context characterised by rules and regulations, power and control, and quality assurance which are all critical for understanding the interaction between supervisors and PhD students.

10.4 Context of supervision encounters and supervision

This section focuses on relationship dynamics that occur during the supervision interaction in South African universities and seeks to analyse what supervisors and PhD students do, and accurately identify the dynamics in relationships that characterise supervision experiences. The nature of context of supervision significantly contributes to the contestations and tensions that characterise doctoral supervision. Therefore, I consider factors, discussed in Chapter five, such as quality, historical factors, institutional ranking, nature of students and institutional expectations, as having an impact on doctoral supervision. This is vital in revealing that doctoral supervision is the outcome in a process, described by Laske and Zuber-Skerrit (1996), as involving and fostering and facilitating learning, at the highest level. Such a description makes supervision a straightforward engagement devoid of contextual tension, contestations, and interpersonal realities.

As discussed in Chapter eight, the formal aspects of doctoral supervision, exposed through diverse models and strategies of supervision, should make it possible for students to

sail through their PhD programmes. But given the claim that supervisors' "lack of robust conceptual understanding of what supervision involves" (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2005, p.100) (students too, may lack a robust conceptual understanding of what supervision involves). My analysis of the context of supervision focused on what transpired and results from the pedagogical interaction between PhD students and their supervisors participating in this study.

I seek to show that the indeterminate context of supervision presents grounds for contestations and contradictions. These issues are either consciously or unconsciously undergirded by the structures that inform supervision in the department.

(i) Working in a departmental context

Departments play critical roles in ensuring that doctoral students are allocated supervisors once they are admitted into the PhD programme. As part of the institutional structures, they provide the procedures to be followed and constantly oversee the way they are implemented. They try to ensure that supervisors give "priority to issues of procedure or technique" (Acker, Hill & Black, 1994, p.483) as stipulated in supervision policy and guidelines in the institutions involved. Although PhD supervisors and students acknowledge the role of the department in admission and provision of resources, their accounts suggest that they are distanced from the real work of supervision.

a) *The missing link: faculty, department, and supervisors*

Some university departments do not provide supervisors with the necessary support for the supervision of PhD students. Consequently, there appears to be a missing link between supervisors, department and schools or faculties of education. This is articulated by supervisors and PhD students:

No, it's the department itself that has very little to offer in supporting you as a supervisor. ... So, one might say that there is probably a missing link mm…, within the structures of the school and so that support is not offered by the department ... And yet the department is the one that kind of defines the research areas that pertain or that are close to what the department is there for. So, I think there is probably a missing link there (Famous).

The department or even the faculty does not facilitate the process of actually getting someone into the act of being a supervisor, or even induction phase…. everyone is doing as they please (Gaja).

Not at all, because I was in a new department, and I headed the department immediately I got my PhD. I was the only one with a PhD. Basically, I would teach myself, I mean I was not in the department with people more senior than me (Hilda).

Well, at the departmental level, not much is done by other departmental members unless one consults. ... The department does not seem to provide adequate space for PhD students. They kind of blanket them with other students which I think also is unfair because the bulk of PhD students are mature, experienced family men and professionals (SPh2).

Nothing. I have no relationship whatsoever with the department. The last time I interacted with them was when I was registering sending the forms to be signed. I

don't remember interacting at …. a different not to my knowledge, if it is bothered, they bother themselves and closes it there without my knowledge (SPh 3).

There is not much that I can say about what happens at the department. Because the department has nothing to do with my studies. They just know I am a student at the department (SPh6).

Responding to the levels of support received from the department, this student was more particular in what she felt the department should be doing which would firstly hold supervisors accountable and secondly, better support the student in completion of the research:

Constant checks, constant monitoring, you can monitor them. [Departments] should also get feedback about the progress of students not only from supervisors but also from PhD students … about… they must also track the feelings of the students that they know…. Maybe, maybe a quarterly report or a semester report on how you feel about your supervisor so that supervisors become accountable once as a mentee or as a student you mention things that did not go right, they will be able, they will be able, maybe to improve. And they should use the weaknesses of the supervisors to rebuild for future (SPh4).

From these narratives, departments seem to be a context in which contestation and tension are created during the supervision process. Participants indicate that their departments in some cases, do not provide the kind/nature of support they need. The disconnection and seeming lack of support allows for supervisors and students to operate differently, thus

sometimes generating the space for contestation, but it could also afford them opportunities to be innovative.

However, depending on the department, support is provided to both supervisors and students in the form of a working space, computer laboratories and academic support between PhD supervisors and students. These forms of support are typical of elements of a structured field in which, according to DiMaggio (1979), affect the competition inherent in the field. This kind of support system by the department makes the context friendly and creates a conducive environment for learning or supervising. This is captured by these supervisors:

> *The departments …. give space to supervisors and so are very supportive because we are all in the same boat and it is in all of our benefit to be productive and get students to finish their studies. So, from the departments just confirms the rules of the faculty you know in terms of procedures, requirements, enrolments, and the admin around PhD work* (Gurus).

> *I think now that we are having PhD weekends. So that is very useful because I see how other supervisors are working. I get exposed to other supervisors by listening to other projects that are presented* (Leah).

In addition to space and computer laboratory facilities, some PhD students pointed out that financial support (bursaries), funds for writing retreats, procedures for raising complaints, organisation of departmental workshops/seminars as crucial forms of support.

The department is very supportive because it gives us financial support, we have got a venue where we can sit as PhD students to do our work, although this lab aspect… it closes earlier … we need longer hours to work…Yes.... we even went for a writing retreat. He took us somewhere, they paid for it, …. I think that there is a grievance procedure, which is there that you have to follow if you are not happy, you can change a supervisor (SPh1).

The department … provides facilities, especially they avail computer laboratories. There is a postgraduate lab that is at the disposal of PhD students and there are also what I call departmental seminars where doctoral students can interact and compare notes and they build one another in terms of research techniques (SPh2).

I think the positive side is that they give us the Supervisor Linked Bursary which runs for three years (long pause). *I think that is the positive thing and sometimes they also organise some seminars which I think is also a positive thing…* (SPh5).

And the department at times they hold some workshops. That is the only thing I can say I get from the department. I get some workshops in research at times they can … [invite experts] lecturers to talk about certain topics about once or twice a year. …. So that is the help that I can say the department can give at times (SPh6).

David Do, a supervisor and a participant in this study, indicated that his department provides financial support that is critical in organising writing retreats. (His office was packed. It had no place to do many things. I could not use his office table to take notes).

However, supervisors who have been in the field of supervision for a long time seem to have little or no regard at all for departmental support.

> *I don't use the department to do things. I mean that is what I do … people who haven't supervised students are usually the most obstructive in looking for the department…. Can I repeat that? People who haven't supervised students are using the massive structures by looking at interviews because they don't know, they don't know the realities of supervision that PhD is a developing process* (Charisma).

Departmental support however varies among PhD students and supervisors. Some supervisors confess that they hardly consult the department in supervision encounters. However, missing links in departmental support are filled by schools or faculties of education as pointed out by these participants:

> *I think the support we get is not really by the department but by the school, rather than by the department itself* (Famous).

> *So sometimes [the school] it puts pressure, sometimes the pressure is good sometimes it is bad, I think that's mainly so* (Leah).

> *I don't remember being… receiving [any support from the department] … except the school, it has been giving some encouragements, that man ... They are probably pressuring our supervisors to speed up your progress* (SPh3).

Thus, the context of the institution, the intersecting context of the department and the faculty/school in some cases, allows for the provision of support for students and supervisors. As a result, several observations can be made. First, departments tend to focus on structural conditioning - through codes of rules and regulations - rather than maximising the role of individual and collective agency of students and their supervisors. Second, concerns tend to remain at the administrative level, that is compliance and throughput while other academic issues such as a suitable environment, academic enrichment and the nature of student under supervision tend to be neglected or left to the discretion of individual supervisors.

However, some pertinent roles such as collecting views from supervisors and students about their experiences in the supervision matrix, preparing semester or quarterly reports on PhD student/supervisor progress are not executed by the department, leaving both PhD students and supervisors uninformed. But some students accounts suggest that do not read supervision guidelines and procedures provided by the department regarding supervision. As a result, their observations are made from lack of knowledge of some of the provisions in these guidelines. For instance, as it will be revealed later in this chapter, some students endure suffering in the hands of supervisors, yet there are outlets available to all PhD students. Although, there seem to be no effort being made by departments to ensure that students and supervisors are thoroughly informed about these procedures.

In this chapter, potential tension at the departmental level were identified as resulting from several factors: first, the perceived expectations of supervisors to receive support from the department was not realised. Second, the nature of support given to students did not directly relate to the process of supervision. Third, the consistency in the PhD student and

supervisors' acknowledgement of minimal support constitutes a fertile ground for tensions and contestations. Some of these contestations manifest themselves as follows:

b) Norms and standards in doctoral education: a contested terrain

Conceptions about the quality of a thesis ready for submission vary greatly between supervisors and PhD students. In this study, the data revealed that some students put pressure on their supervisors to sign their theses for submission. However, the affected supervisors protest silently and rejecting such calls and insisting that the student incorporates the required changes. One supervisor explains how the size of the thesis, student's rejection of supervisory advice and university reputation became a point of contestation that resulted in a power struggle.

> *One, the one lady who studied in the UK and in my personal view - I won't be able to identify her. I think it was a very bad dissertation that a person handed in at the university in UK and I was actually furious that they were doing that during supervision because I know UK supervision, it's, it's excellent supervision. They have got good products on the market but in the end the lady said to me, when the changes were recommended. She said to me … 'I don't think am going to do the changes' – I said that is your decision, if you don't want to do it here, we terminate the story here. Look at me, look at my colleague, we are not going to do it for you. So, go your way, there you have got the recommendations…, you go and do it and if you don't come back that's ok with me. Because I don't have responsibility for the candidate, I take responsibility for the work of the candidate but the work that the candidate must do. So, I think that was difficult but that was, was one.*

Another one a candidate a very strong candidate submitted to me such a thick piece of work and the candidate wanted to transgress boundaries. So, the dean, the then dean said to me: 'my two rulings, one ruling is no letters to you, this person [student] should not try to write any personal letters to you and the other one is all reasonable directives have to be taken from you' and when this thick piece came in during by 1st December the person said to me, 'here is my work'. I said what is that? It is my chapter on the empirical data. I said 'that thick. It's a thesis. I am not going read it. Go and condense it to 40 pages.' There is so much on the condensing. You've given me raw data. So, the tears started flowing and I almost told the student to give it to me but then I realised that this is transgressing of boundaries again. The person doesn't remember it because he had reached the end of the journey. But by the end of January, the 40 pages came in, excellent and one of the best theses that was written. And there are numerous of them though (Charisma).

In this account, tension between a supervisor and a student builds on the grounds of what is considered a 'bad' thesis and chapter from the perspective of the supervisor. PhD supervisors care about quality of work produced in the environments where they work. Given that accountability and transparency are essential in determining the quality of the thesis, and the fact that the supervisor in question knows the global expectations of a good thesis, he invoked issues of quality when he rejected the two products because they did not meet the standards required. This confirms the development of a quality culture (Smidt, 2015) among PhD supervisors in South African higher education and the partner institutions value the quality of the products in higher education (Ryan, 2015). This important fact is not well understood by most PhD students.

Perhaps the power dimension of supervision makes it a more problematic engagement in practice. For instance, students assume some powers, depending on their mental faculty. Some supervisors resist such attempts, as in the previous case and as seen in the experience that follows:

> *One…I have ever supervised was an academic who thought she knew much more than she knew. She thought she never needed a supervisor. She thought she knew everything. You can actually not teach somebody who feels she knows everything. And right at the end, I wouldn't sign off her thesis… She wasn't the most difficult student. I did have one student who fired me and one…. one student who fired me…ok. But this student was not the one who was the most difficult for me. Because she thought she knew it all and she wanted to hand in her thesis and I said, 'I am not signing it off" she said, "I am going to hand in" and I said, 'but I am not signing off'. She said, "what does it mean?" I said 'it means I don't think it is ready but you don't have to…o… if you think it is ready and you don't agree with me, the rules say you can hand in without my signature…I am not putting my signature. She was so furious of me…so furious. She had to do another six months….* (Hilda).

Most supervisors are caught up in the mix of defending the quality of the work they supervise while defending the academic and disciplinary contexts that govern the process of supervision and handling difficult PhD students, as stipulated by the department. They do this as a way of consciously or unconsciously enacting departmental rules and regulations, ensuring the quality as well as practising their own and institutional power. In the process, they take firm but difficult decisions to improve student performance and maintain the required quality standards. By taking such difficult decisions, they inspire some of the

students, nurture friendship as they move towards the end or become friends long after the supervision experience. For example, this participant takes a stern action for those who tend to transgress but the action is short-lived:

> *If a candidate transgresses my boundaries; I will easily assist the candidate decide based on your own personal development, you don't transgress the boundaries and otherwise I force the boundaries down because it is in that person's good… for that person's interests. However, some of my candidates have finished, we have become very good friends* (Charisma).

Ultimately, supervisors have the power and decline to sign work that is of low quality. The significance of supervisor power is articulated by Bourdieu (1998b, p. 40-41) who observes that every "social space has people who dominate and people who are dominated". The central issue pursued in this thesis relates to transmission of embodied cultural capital. But in this context, supervisors invoke cultural capital that is indicative of class position on one hand, that is mobilised to enhance knowledge transmission and cultural capital as a power resource (scientific and technical) that is invoked (Lamont & Lareau, 1988) on the other hand, not only to harness control of the student, but also to maintain thesis supervision quality standards.

c) In the shadow of feedback: delays, violations, and compliance

Interactions between supervisors and their PhD students are achieved through feedback. However, feedback on work varies from one PhD supervisor to another. It is also influenced by the relationship between students and the supervisors as well as individual student abilities. Apparently, students spend substantial time and energy trying to cope with

what is considered as delayed feedback from their supervisors. Interestingly, students respond differently to these experiences. Some wait patiently until their supervisors respond while others, who are well versed with complaint procedures, move on to change supervisors. This is well captured in the following accounts from students:

> *For my supervisor, the past one year, I would say, it has been agonising …. Agonising in the sense that there are times when I felt that I was getting unfair treatment in this supervision process. You know in terms of say you submit a chapter expecting feedback within a month. Sometimes feedback was not coming in a month as expected and it would come after three months and that to me was a stumbling block- a big one* (SPh2).

Other students do not have the patience to wait. A student who has had distinctions at all levels of her postgraduate education does not understand why feedback should take up to three months had this to say; *'I think that there is a grievance procedure, which is there that you have to follow if you are not happy, you can change your supervisor, like myself I have changed supervisors like three times!'* (SPh1). This participant feels that such delays have had an impact on her objectives.

> *Yes, this is the third one (supervisor) am using, yes, it is up to you, so I don't know… because I didn't want to waste my time, and you can change, so I didn't want to waste time, because I have planned, I have my goals, … and I don't want a situation where I would be delayed by feedback* (SPh1).

Focused to complete her doctorate on time, it seems SPh1's way of working was in dissonance with the first two supervisors. She explains her experiences with supervisor feedback:

> *So, the first one I did my proposal, I presented, [after some time] he said no, it does not suit this department, go to curriculum, I went there, I got a supervisor, after three months he didn't give me feedback, I moved on to get another one, the one I am having now… I sent him [the second one] a message that I have moved to another supervisor…* (SPh1).

Clearly, decisions taken by PhD students in relation to interaction with their supervisors, as pertains to feedback in the academic context, is related to their individual backgrounds; how they are constituted and what they expect from their academic supervisors. Not all students feel that they can confront their supervisors or take decisions that could damage their relations with supervisors. Consequently, they resort to silence with the hope that their supervisors will at some point, improve on time taken to provide feedback. In a low tone, reminiscent of someone who is either nervous, respects the supervisor or has succumbed to the status quo, this participant notes:

> *You know …you are talking…there's… there's that gap within us, there's that distance between us … you are talking to someone who is your supervisor, so it is difficult to come up with openness to express your emotions about it [delayed feedback]. So, you will always try to be polite since you know that there's that distance between you and that whole academic distance, you are looking at your mentor and you wouldn't want*

to disappoint him so you may end up …. if I may put this way, you may end up telling what you think he may not want to hear from you (SPh5).

From the data, it seems that students' failure to approach supervisors and discuss issues pertaining to feedback is because they do not want to take responsibility and want to pass on the blame to the supervisor. Alternatively, students see the supervisors as all-powerful and feels inadequate to challenge him/her and the supervision process. Thus, power play is reflected in the student's hesitance to request feedback on written work within a specific timeframe. These feelings constitute a function of habitus working in consonance with cultural capital (Davey, 2009, p.227) to limit tensions between students and supervisors on one hand and to define a student's position (of intellectual power) in the supervision matrix on the other. This student is not alone; taking on self-imposed silences is a common practice among PhD students.

I would say, the nature of the supervisor was such that [he/she] didn't care whether you were happy or not …but I think I would say perhaps it was because I would, I would put on a mask even when things, when cheeks were down. I would be putting on a mask, you know because I was determined to go through with my PhD programme. Remember at one point when things were getting tough for me in terms of duration of the study, I went to see [my supervisor]. I was trying to put on a happy face but deep down in me, it was eating me up and when I presented my concerns, … didn't appear to care (SPh2).

From these accounts, the data revealed that student backgrounds have a direct impact on how students behave. One, students tend to be loyal, submissive, and respectful to their

supervisors (teachers). Two, the social position of the supervisor accords him/her some power (cultural capital) over the student which curtails the student's urge to confront him/her on certain issues. Three, some students feel that making some demands is tantamount to 'disappointing [them].'

Although students point at the rate at which feedback is given as contentious, some supervisors differ greatly with students' views:

> *Some lecturers will give feedback after two or three weeks….* (Jarem).

> *When I say commitment, for example, giving feedback within four days. … I keep the momentum going…. I am committed to what I am doing. So that the student knows that when an appointment is set, I will honour the appointment. … When I don't …, I will write to the student to find out what's happening. So, in this way, I believe that the student has faith in the supervisor* (Jarem).

> *Over the years I never had one that could not finish, I never had one who even took a year longer, I don't think so but then it was this thing that I told you about maintaining contact with the student* (Gaja).

Evidently, delays in feedback are not characteristic of all supervisors. Supervisors vary in giving students timely feedback. However, from these supervisor accounts, inadequate levels of commitment, failure by supervisors to follow up make students lose faith in the supervision process. At the same time, supervision experiences are formally regulated, with some institutions, such as UJ, having formal, signed supervision agreements/contracts that

aim at guiding and regulating the process. In this study, most of the students who participated did not make any reference to this contract. As such, there are bound to be questions about whether these students signed the contract, how it is understood, implemented, and monitored by the respective authorities.

(ii) Ethics of care: an elusive strand in doctoral supervision encounters

There is no doubt that supervisors play a crucial role in the lives of PhD students. In this endeavour, they rely mostly on research knowledge (Beasley, 1998), ability to coordinate activity programmes and student projects, mentor students (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004) and build networks with and among other doctoral students as well as possess the management and inter-personal skills (Vilkinas, 2005) that are crucial in discharging these roles. However, this study found that although it is assumed that they discharge these roles ethically, considering that they are handling human beings, student rights, confidentiality and freedom are at times violated by some supervisors. Accounts by this PhD student, who is a mother, a wife, and a university staff member, are critical to the argument pursued in this chapter:

> *You know sometimes I would use silent resistance for the one [a supervisor] who left – silent resistance and sometimes I verbalised when I felt violated because my stuff [feedback from the supervisor] was circulated on campus amongst colleagues even my HODs when I received chapters my, my chapter, when I received corrections those correction… those corrections would be, would be sent to my HOD, so I found that to be unethical. I was violated! So, it was very, very challenging…. Mm… very disturbing and you know you lose your sense of being, you lose your self-concept!* (SPh4).

Having been violated, the student raised her concerns in public prompting what she describes as a 'fight' with the supervisor: *'I would tell them that I am not happy and several times we do have meetings over our 'fights' and lack of cooperation with each other- several times'* (SPh 4). At the same time, the intersection of the family and one's respect (right to confidentiality) while doing doctoral studies, is questioned. As Backhouse (2009) acknowledges, family context affects doctoral education by either encouraging or discouraging one to study. In this study, the participant in question was appalled by the supervisor's behaviour because the PhD student confirmed the effect that it had on her '*sense of being'*, how she felt that her self-worth was being eroded and confidence in her ability was being questioned. While the conduct by the supervisor is blatantly unethical, it is highlights some aspects of both intellectual and behavioural strands that relate to supervisors' cultural capital (training & schooling) and habitus (interactive aspects developed over time in the process of interacting with people) (Reay, David & Ball, 2005) - particularly in the way in which he/she deals with other people. Supervisors are also aware of these practices among colleagues.

> *If am unaware of vulnerability of a person who I am supervising…. I cannot just develop them that way …, I must see them as vulnerable that is what also, what I learnt from my two supervisors – I am a human being and as a human being you are vulnerable. I can crash you …, I can tear you a part. I have heard horrible stories in these corridors when one of the persons who I am working with…. ok, I have for example heard a person say… at another university, PhD is very difficult, and you must not think that you going to get one - which is nonsense! You are … it should be in my ability to assist that person to achieve because I am of the conviction that if you*

have got an undergraduate study and you want to, you could get a doctorate! (Charisma).

Vulnerability in this context refers to remarks some supervisors inadvertently make about their students but forget how detrimental they are bound to be on the candidate's well-being. These lack of attention to PhDs students' feelings may be a result of the department demanding too much from a supervisor or the fact that less attention is paid to PhDs compared to masters' programmes (Backhouse, 2009). This supervisor is of the view that during supervision encounters, supervisors should acknowledge that:

The candidate … is a human being. [They] need to see a human being in the humanness, and that means, they are in a family, they are in a community. The PhD is not the only thing they are working on. And what I have picked up with some of my colleagues, they don't see this, this part. So, to me I see a PhD as a small part of this person's life, and I am not sure promoters are always aware of life beyond and beside the PhD (Charisma).

Tensions rise among PhD supervisors and their students is partly because students feel that supervisors fail to acknowledge the multiple roles that they play in society. PhD students can be staff members in an organisation, family people or colleagues in the department. Therefore, *'The PhD is not the only thing they are working on'* (Charisma). PhD supervisors should consider the multiple roles that the PhD candidates play and acknowledge the difficulty and challenges that they might be experiencing in the fine art of balancing these roles.

But PhD supervisors are also aware of tensions between colleagues and PhD students that depict them as unethical and uncaring. In this incident for instance, a supervisor sympathises with a student who has been rejected by several others and takes it upon himself to supervise this student, even with the full knowledge that he/she is a difficult case.

> *Two…, two different supervisors did not want to work with the students as they had their own problems in terms of writing. … So, I recall back, I took a responsibility when nobody else wanted the student…. … It was a trying experience; it was not easy. In fact, there were many instances I wanted to give up because I knew what the other two[colleagues] had experienced. There was resilience in me. I committed myself and ensured the student qualifies* (Jarem).

From these accounts, it can be deduced that individual supervisors and students have a multifaceted relationship. Supervisors need to provide support and encouragement to their students, making them feel a sense of belonging to an academic family in a PhD supervision context. The context of workplace is familiar to professionals who work in organisations. PhD supervisors are usually academic professionals in universities. In schools and faculties of education, they specialise in particular areas of education and they have experience in teaching and supervising at higher education (Lessing & Schulz, 2002). They have to offer emotional support when the need arises in the supervision encounter (Mouton, 2001). As a result, the ‘ethics of care’, ‘pastoral role’ or ‘mentoring’ call for PhD supervisors to stretch the parameters of doctoral supervision to respond to the specific contextual challenges they encounter in South African universities. Ethics of care as an instrumental construct in education discourses, political, law, societal organisations, war, and international relations (Held, 2006). This author, like Mouton, acknowledges the value in emotional caring and

involvement in other people's works. Therefore, doctoral supervisors have to be more open-minded and recognise the humanness in the person engaged in the doctoral process. Some form of mentoring is essential in helping PhD students successfully overcome challenging experiences (Pembridge, 2011).

Apparently, accounts by these supervisors point to the possibility that some supervisors do not provide the intensive socialisation to their candidates that purports to inculcate professional community values and standards of professional integrity, judgement, and loyalty which amount to the creation of a professional habitus (Beck & Young, 2005). This seemingly inadequate care for holistic development is also eloquent in this excerpt:

> *…. But one thing, what I could find is, perhaps as a faculty we have neglected one thing - to work on the mind of the student and the beliefs, the attitude and… the option the affective part, that part of the student. We [don't] address that sufficiently. And as a supervisor, I said towards the 90s or later, I started to raise that because I said that you know what, you can't just embrace the process, and the product and the content, you have to address the student as a person* (Gaja).

Thus, as pointed out by Bourdieu (1977), people's personified ability is the capability to take on certain attitudes and actions that are pertinent in particular social fields. In its broader sense, habitus allows individuals:

> To act in a particular way, a 'taken for granted' world view that we carry around with us, deeply internalized within our bodies as well as our minds, usually below the level of consciousness; absorbed into our cognitive structures from a very young age (Tranter, 2006, p.4).

Thus, some supervisors will react differently to doctoral students on the basis of having developed certain patterns of reactions over time. Depending on the supervisors' background, the reactions are bound to either nurture the feelings of care or at the extreme end of the spectrum, damage the student-supervisor beyond repair. Nevertheless, supervision knowledge, as a limited resource, equips supervisors with the ability to conceptualise what they do in terms of rules and regulations in the process of supervision, which they discharge differently. For instance, in the previously situation, one supervisor does not possess the skills on how to deal with student feedback. Central to the argument in this chapter, however, is that doctoral supervision is punctuated with multiple action, reaction, tensions, and contestations that are instrumental for understanding supervisors, their perceptions of supervision encounters and how they function in seemingly difficult situations.

10.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that doctoral supervision is not a smooth progression for the participants. It is an engagement in which departmental provisions, supervisors, and students' personal attributes unite to present varying levels of tensions and contestations that emerge from their interaction. Central to the PhD student-supervisor contestations are departments and faculties/school of education. Although the respective departments provide some forms of support, PhD supervisors and students still feel unsupported by their respective departments. While departments provide the general rules and guidelines for PhD supervision, they do not seem to pay attention to interactions and experiences created by supervision encounters. At the same time, differences in perceptions on what supervisors count as departmental support and the fact that quite often, the faculty/school play significant roles in providing support for

students and supervisors, provide the basis for contestations and tensions in the arena of supervision.

It is also observed that inadequate support and failure to perform certain roles, exposes students to insensitive supervision experiences which may produce scholars with limited capacity to participate in critical academic engagements. This is reflected in the way that students and supervisors compete over the quality of a thesis. At personal level, however, supervisors are presented as people, whose aim is not only to train candidates into researchers but also observe and enforce some of the rules and regulations that govern the process, while maintaining high standards of thesis supervision. In the process, they invoke the power vested in university structures (Deans' office) and their own power - embodied cultural capital - to ward off the tensions and contestations with students. To a large extent, students end up complying with supervisors as they invoke institutional, personal, and professional regulations to achieve their goals.

In addition, tensions in supervision tend to arise from deficiencies in ethics of care among some of the supervisors. In this dimension, displaying feedback on student work in the department, continued verbal 'fights' with students, declining to work with students who are deemed to be weak, is perceived to be ethically unprofessional practice. Although these cases prevail, some supervisors advocate for holistic understanding of PhD candidates and acknowledgement of their vulnerability as human beings.

Thus, given this scenario, the argument points to the need for departments/divisions to streamline and realign their roles in doctoral supervision. There is need for dialogue between supervisors, students, and department/divisions that will address issues that cause constant

tension in supervision engagements. It also points to the need for supervisors and students to engage productively and negotiate their 'modus operandi' during the supervision encounter. Suggestively, this could involve constantly reminding students and supervisors to refer to supervision regulations and where possible, signed contract and supervisor student code of ethics. Generally, the chapter, calls on supervisors not only to focus their attention on students as PhD candidates, but also as vulnerable human beings, engaged in multiple roles in society beyond the doctorate.

Eventually, doctoral supervision is not just about students working on their thesis; it is also about complex departmental and faculty structures, personalities, backgrounds, professional and global expectations, intricate relationships, and experiences as well as a wealth of experience in understanding the dynamics of supervision. Such an engagement requires a negotiated understanding, patience and commitment that is guided not only by the diverse set of discourses on doctoral supervision, but also the unique context in which the process takes place.

In the next chapter, I focus on how these emotions can be controlled and used to improve doctoral supervision.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

How can PhD supervision be improved in South African universities?

11.1 Introduction

At the end of the supervision encounter, PhD students and supervisors do not have time to reflect on their experiences as they both walk to the podium when the student is formally granted the doctoral degree. What is evidently not in their minds at this point is the topography of doctoral supervision – the moments from enrolment to the podium – the interactions, the waiting for each other, the tensions and contests, the diverse contradictions, their conflicting and unison understandings, the light moments, the lowest moments and the contestations of doctoral supervision. When writing this thesis, I found that supervision takes place in social spaces, bringing people, ideas, and expectations of a diverse kind together. Such places, as pointed out in Chapters eight and nine are coupled with tensions, misunderstandings, lack of knowledge, frustration that seem to result into humility. With such experiences, the question remains: *How can PhD research supervision under the peculiar learning conditions of South African universities be improved?* This chapter argues that although doctoral supervision is fraught with challenges and problems emanating from both personal, pedagogical, and contextual factors, it is a process that can be improved. The argument is centred on the premise that PhD students and supervisor experiences are crucial in improving supervision. Surprisingly, PhD students point to some of the most frustrating experiences as points of departure for possible improvements, making this chapter the most fluid regarding supervision improvement. Ways of improving doctoral supervision are many and varied as is the context, the practice of doctoral supervision and the supervision capacity

that participants find themselves in. In the end, this study suggests that supervision of doctorates is a complex social and contextual process whose improvement depends on multiple adjustments in human, social and contextual aspects of supervision.

In Section 11.2 of this chapter, I pay attention to the conceptual framework which is taken from the main conceptual framework discussed in Chapter three. Section 11.3 focuses on the intersecting context and doctoral supervision while Section 11.4 delves into the interviews with participants in the study, paying attention to the suggestions of participants of ways in which doctoral supervision can be improved. The study pays attention to the enhancement of context, practice, and supervisor capacity to engage in this complex exercise. Section 11.5 elaborates further on ways to improve it from the point of view of the participants. In 11.6, I conclude the chapter.

11.2 Conceptual framework

This chapter draws on the study's conceptual framework which locates successful doctoral supervision in the way individuals are constituted to supervise doctorates (habitus), and creatively negotiate complex (agency) situations during supervision intercourse. Agency like habitus is a highly contested concept that explains human initiative, creativity, or determined will to pursue a cause of action (McAlpine, 2012). Since it comes in operation based on past and present experiences, with the aim of unravelling a challenging situation for the sake of the future, within the realm of this chapter, I share the definition of that agency as:

> A temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past, (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities)

and towards the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects with the contingencies [possibilities] of the moment) (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p.963).

This conception helps to place PhD students and supervisors in the institutional context, where the supervision process has been and is still structured. It also provides a mirror into their own 'selves' as people who can, depending on what they want to achieve, negotiate and manage challenging complex situations. Explicitly, Biesta and Tedder (2006, p.5) observe that "agency is not exclusively an individual achievement but is connected to contextual and structural factors." Therefore, it is only those involved in doctoral supervision that can accurately suggest ways of improving it.

For this study, I strive to isolate myself from the problematic situations in which supervisors engage, forms of actions or practices and suggest ways of overcoming these challenges or better still, give a novel direction different from the way things have been done before. I focus attention on ways of improving the context or environment for supervision, strategies for enhancing the practice of supervision and strategies for improving supervision capacity of individual doctoral supervisors. These actions tend to unsettle conventional ways of doing things thus inviting transformation to their habitus.

The concepts of agency and habitus, as two extremes in human nature, are used to locate and understand ways in which supervision of doctorates can be improved. In using these concepts, I reflect on supervisor/student *habituses* as structured entities but play out agency as "a psychological and social-psychological make-up, of the actors" (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p.973) within which innovations and improvements in supervision practices are embedded.

11.3 Intersecting context and improvement of doctoral supervision

Ways to improve doctoral supervision are embedded in the individual and the context within which the supervision process takes place. While both PhD students and supervisors encounter the department, the discipline, and micro aspects of context such as quality assurance as possible avenues for strategic improvement of supervision, doctoral students and supervisors as individuals and within their relationships, form part of the context of supervision. At departmental context, several things can happen in relation to management, the discipline and the application of rules and regulations that aim at improving supervision. Thus, the disciplines, practices, research, and experiences can be improved by supervisors and students. For supervisors who studied abroad, relationships and supervision encounters with the local PhD students require that student background forms part of their context while for students, supervisor background too form part of their context in establishing relationships and the ensuing supervision experiences. However, the list of contextual issues and how they can be employed to improve supervision cannot be exhausted. Elsewhere in this chapter, I point out that how to improve supervision, as expressed by supervisors, is mainly explained in relation to specific supervision experiences.

Support for use of the contexts to model improvement in doctoral supervision is derived from the view that how supervisors and PhD students constitute their own environment (Boud & Lee 2005, p.505), is a crucial factor for improving doctoral supervision. Thus, the reasoning in this section is drawn from the intersecting context by Backhouse (2009), as used to explain the diverse context within which the doctoral education operates. I transpose this logic to explain strategies that can be used to improve doctoral supervision in South African universities. This will be illustrated in the next section, where several strategies emanating from these contexts that are critical to the improvement of doctoral supervision.

11.4 Improving doctoral supervision in South Africa

Can doctoral supervision be improved in South African universities? Pedagogical practices, as realised in the realm of doctoral supervision, are not cast in stone. Interviews with participants indicate that all is not lost, as discussed in Chapters eight and nine. In addressing this, I start by discussing strategies that can be used to improve the context of doctoral supervision.

(i) Enhancing the context of PhD supervision

One of the central roles of a doctoral supervisor is to guide and direct PhD students through research process and prepare them to enter specific spaces. PhD supervision takes place in a context that is shaped by social, political, economic, and cultural factors that to a large extent determine the success of this process. The success of a doctoral supervisor, in addition to his or her experience, depends on how well they are able to manoeuvre these contextual factors. While supervisors engage in this process, little is known about the kind of students and environment that will shape the process. The outcome is that they encounter a wide range of challenges and tensions because of the complexity of academia and human relations.

a) Deans and heads of department must come on board

In one of the universities, participants felt that one of the most fruitful ways to improve doctoral supervision context was for the Faculty Deans and Heads of Departments/Schools to be more involved in the doctoral supervision process. For some PhD students, the administration tended to be indifferent to supervisor-doctoral student engagement. Although accounts varied slightly, they nonetheless indicated that administrators could play an important role in improving PhD supervision through various roles.

I think they can be addressed if the deans and heads of departments can start developing a keen interest in the goings on in the department … as far as supervision is concerned. I don't think deans are actively involved in monitoring. Perhaps if deans and HODs ask for constant reports on progress from each supervisor, or even monthly reports on how supervision is going on, I think that way things can improve. Supervision can improve because in the end you can see some resources are being, are being wasted or underutilised… So, I think this can be…. can be addressed, I think what is needed is that the heads of departments and deans of faculties need to be thorough in their monitoring of PhD supervision by their lecturers…… [This is] because some supervisors become complacent with the student and abuse the students and especially in wanting them to publish with them. … You start publishing from your thesis, you always make sure that you involve your supervisor somehow. So, there is a danger that some supervisors can take advantage (SPh 2).

Constant checks, constant monitoring, you can monitor them… with …, maybe they should also get feedback about the progress of students not only from supervisors but also from students…., they must also track the feelings of the students… how the student feels about the complete supervision. Maybe, maybe a quarterly report or a semester report on how you feel about your supervisor so that supervisors become accountable once as a mentee or as a student you mention things that did not go right, they will be able, they will be able maybe to improve. And they should use the weaknesses of the supervisors to rebuild for future (SPh 4).

I would suggest that there be a social contract of the whole PhD supervision process. There must be an, an agreed upon conditions which both parties must agree to adhere to. That is what, that is where I would start. Deans and HODs should also be involved (SPh 3).

The level of laxity in deans and HODs' offices can be improved on to ensure that there is more vigilance on the process. These offices are meant to enable supervision, becoming involved in the students' progress; however, they seem to have a *laissez faire* [hands off] attitude. Students also suggested that regular monthly/semester progress reports for each PhD student, which track student progress and relationships with supervisors, is very helpful and would establish a clear policy framework to enhance accountability and improve the practice of supervision.

Although supervision guidelines in the departments of education indicate that supervisors submit reports on students' progress, it is not clear about what is expressed in these reports and how the contents of the report are reacted on. What emerges is that students' voices are suppressed, and they remain complacent in their engagement with their supervisors and at times, the students are under immense *'pressure to publish'* (SPh2). In support of these views, student SPh6 expressed doubts about the place and role of departments in enhancing supervision, thus reinforcing the fact that Deans and HODs should retrace their steps to establish *'where the rain started beating'* them regarding their context in doctoral supervision. For him:

(Hesitating) *No way, I cannot think of any way. Because the department just takes for granted that the students work well with their supervisors. But there is nothing that*

they can do to enhance the relationship between the supervisor and the student. Not much that I know of (SPh6).

One significant point that the participant makes that cannot be overlooked is that the Dean usually gets involved when students extend their studies beyond four years. At this point, the Faculty Dean's voice is heard.

Any student who exceeds the four years, the Dean will always be on the supervisor to ask him or her why the student is not completing. But this is not our area. We just hear, as hearsay from the lecturers that the dean is also worried when the students don't complete on time. So most probably they have a time limit to say that a student… when a student exceeds… takes more than four years they begin to wonder why he or she is taking too long (SPh6).

Thus, supervision can be greatly improved if collaboration between Deans, HODs, and PhD students work in unison, with strategic reminders about time and risks associated with failure to complete on time. Deans and HODs should also strengthen their managerial role in monitoring supervision. They should secure their participation in all activities entailed in student supervision - leading by example. For instance, they should make it a priority to attend important functions that pertain to doctoral students and their supervisors in the form of workshops and seminars. But deans are not entirely off duty as this participant says: *'Most supervisors… are encouraged by the Dean that the students should complete their studies by four years and so on'* (SPh6).

b) A bottom-up approach to supervision policy formulation should be adopted

Throughout the interviews, some supervisors felt that improved supervision practices could be realised if they were involved in formulating policies relating to doctoral education and supervision. More notable in this regard is this supervisor's remark.

> *Ok, I have given you my voice already, people in management don't know how students need to be supervised* (Charisma).

What is subtler is the deployment of consultants by the government to draw policies that guide the practice of supervision. Asked whether she was involved in policy formulation that guides doctoral supervision, her response was categorical:

> *No. I am not involved, but maybe others are. Some people want to be involved in, maybe they are, the government, after all consultants/experts in that but I am not involved. I can't tell you about others* (Leah).

However, previously supervisors were involved in this process through their respective deans and heads of department. Although this supervisor acknowledges this, she also confirms that they are no longer involved.

> *Look, because …. I was involved more when I was on the postgraduate project. Now that it doesn't happen more at school and faculty level, but I happened to be on those committees,* (Pause) *now, so now I wasn't personally involved. The university is, perhaps through the Deputy Vice-Chancellor research and through, you know when I was on the postgraduate project I was often asked to comment on the document. Now I don't know who's commenting on them* (Hilda).

It is apparent that, there is not really a forum where doctoral supervisors engage with policy makers to provide them with feedback about supervision. At the same time, those in management do not adequately understand the nitty-gritty of doctoral supervision in practice. Thus, reconnecting policy issues and the practice of PhD supervision with supervisors will improve the context of supervision and prepare a well-informed policy to guide doctoral supervision. This linkage can positively impact the process of PhD supervision.

c) Administration should play a supportive rather than a punitive role

Faculties, schools, or departments within which a supervisor works can be critical in improving the process of doctoral supervision.

> *Administration should play the supportive function and not the punitive function that they have taken …. So, I don't, I am just saying that if we can make the administrative process, less punitive and more supportive, then the process can be improved. None, nobody, at this university for the past thirty years has asked me: how can I support you to support the students better?* (Charisma).

Institutional management appears to be more concerned with the number of students who go through the doctoral process without regard to what it takes individual supervisor to guide them. If the management intervention in the supervision process is more positive than punitive, it can significantly improve the supervision process. Supervisors do not only want financial support, but they feel that the management could ask them what support they needed '*how can I support you to support the students better?'* Besides positive and supportive intervention by the administration, faculties and schools of education should reduce administrative paperwork for both PhD students and supervisors. The rules and regulations

that govern the operation of PhD students and their supervisors need to be reduced and made manageable. This will reduce the time taken attending to paperwork and increase the supervision time. Noting that this exercise consumed a lot of time, Hilda, a doctoral supervisor, expressed the level of frustration students went through to register, at times calling on her to intervene for them. It is hoped that such amendments, if well implemented, with the due consideration of availability of resources, willingness of the institution, the readiness of the administrators/supervisors, and their students to embrace change, improvement will be realised (Shiundu & Omulando, 1992).

d) Course work should be introduced

Faced with students who come in with a deficient of knowledge and different needs in their respective fields of study and the fact that some research topics go beyond the confines of a single discipline, one issue that arose was the need to introduce course work at PhD level in South Africa as a way of improving doctoral supervision. One supervisor explained: *'Yes, I think … the lack of coursework, means that our students probably graduate with masters level skills of research rather than PhD level skills of research'* (Famous). However, students need more than research skills and knowledge.

> *But the second thing also is if you don't expose them to multiple, you know, spaces of scholarship which include… mm…, the labour market, industry and commerce, because this is where they are going to be applying their skills afterwards. Now those spaces, by design, should enable exchange of ideas between the people of different um mm… orientations, mm…, career mm… spaces and so on. All those I think need to be fitted into the PhD process (context)* (Famous).

Crafting course work for doctoral programmes will not only address the issues of knowledge, as pointed out by this participant, but also provide the space for candidates to attend courses in other fields beyond their departments, build friendships and trust that can facilitate the development of small/large peer or academic community groups. Another participant pointed out that course work would significantly reduce the time students take to identify research problems, locate literature, and prepare their research proposals. Having pointed out that students who are really up to par is as a major challenge to doctoral supervision, Hilda felt that students' academic weaknesses could be addressed by the introduction of course work as is done in the USA. Similar views were expressed by this participant:

> *Assume that most of the PhD students in South Africa will benefit from doing some course, in addition to doing the dissertation .... course work, and there is a programme of PhD noted to it…. I am talking about content courses; I think they will benefit. A lot of our … our PhD students are attending a course, with us because it is their right, registered as PhD, they can attend masters' courses, but we don't have courses that are designed for PhD* (Leah).

As suggested here, course work is on the rise globally and having studied in Europe, this participant is more resolute and determined to improve doctoral supervision through the introduction of course work.

> *No course work and I think that is, you know, something that we are really thinking about because all over the world now, in the UK now what they call… research training centres. And those research training centres are providing some course work*

for PhD students to deal with issues of methodology … methods of data analysis. And I think we need to be moving in that direction ourselves… I have also proposed that we start a research training programme, so we are going to have one… where all our PhD students must undertake a course on research (Famous).

Apparently, trends in doctoral education and supervision in the Western world continue to have a bearing on doctoral education in South Africa. Avoiding foreign influences is possible by strengthening local masters' programmes, widening their scope, and equipping candidates with adequate skills and knowledge for improving doctoral supervision and introducing course work in the South African university context.

e) Co-supervision should be institutionalised

Supervision of doctoral students should shift from individualised one-on-one model to an institutionalised co-supervision model of supervision. As pointed out in Chapter nine, this model addresses deficiencies one supervisor may lack, orients novice supervisors and deals with issues of attrition in supervision, as articulated by this supervisor:

I find most supervisors have the preference of methodology, mine is qualitative research. I did a masters' in quantitative research, that doesn't mean I like it, so when I get a student who shifts from qualitative to quantitative research, still in my field … I will get a co-supervisor to make sure the methodology is sound, valid, and reliable because I am not a quantitative methodologist and I didn't really want to be a quantitative methodologist, because my depth is with the qualitative methods (Stinka).

While Stinka, underscored this role as a step towards improvement of doctoral supervision, my view is that application of the model advanced is still insufficient until the model is formally institutionalised in institutions of higher learning. In fact, one participant suggests that a reconceptualised mode of supervision is needed with gender consideration. With such arrangements, different issues, doubts, and suspicions in co-supervision triangles are significantly reduced and the students involved gets a better deal, as pointed out by this participant.

> *And then I do not supervise alone. I don't want to do it. Because three heads are better than one. I always have got a colleague. I supervise her candidate, she supervises mine. Today, it is well accepted …. The reason why is, we are a male and female, so I don't have any trouble with females coming and sitting with me and saying I am making sexual advances approaches or do other things. … We protect each other from that kind of nonsense* (Charisma).

Although, as discussed in Chapter nine, co-supervision is affected by other personal and institutional factors, adjustments in the way in which it is currently understood and practiced is a starting point in institutionalising it. The context of doctoral supervision must change significantly to realise any development. The changes suggested here are instrumental in reformatting doctoral programmes and their environment in South Africa.

Added to the issues discussed above, is the practice of supervision. In the subsequent section, suggestions are given for the improvement of supervision.

11.5 Improvement of the practice of supervision

Improving the mode of supervision by supervisors can greatly enhance doctoral supervision. Deploying seminars, joint supervision meetings, writing and methodology workshops, conference attendance, introducing course work, establishing support working groups, maximising peer support for supervisors can immensely improve doctoral supervision in South Africa. Changes to the practice of PhD supervision are discussed as follows.

(i) Entrenching communities in supervision: supervisor-student convergence

Working with peers, small or large communities of doctoral students was identified as one of the ways to improve doctoral supervision in South African universities. Hilda, one of the participants, pointed out that small reading and writing groups were central to effective doctoral supervision. On a wider scale, she suggested that PhD weekends at WSoE, was one of the most effective ways of improving PhD supervision. Another supervisor noted that: *'I also run a group that everybody, all my PhD students meet once a month and somebody will present [a paper], and they do not all work in the same field*' (Leah). Beyond small groups, she says:

> *We also have PhD weekends which sometimes I find useful, … it depends, who they invite to do the main talk, because they invite a guest lecturer, some of them are good and some of them are not great, but I think it's a good idea for students because they are exposed to other students' work, they listen to other supervisor comments…. I think it's good* (Leah).

Some participants indicated that such forums could greatly improve doctoral supervision experiences on campus as suggested by Famous: *'The use of cohort approaches to supervision has substantial benefits'* (Famous).

In addition, small group informal discussions in which students participate, away from their supervisors, are beneficial and often has interesting outcomes. For some, experiences in these spaces makes them more empowered and confident and negates the danger of isolation that PhD students could experience:

> *I have learnt that you are not an island. I think we share the same feelings; we share the same fears, the same backgrounds, like I have learned from other peers that you must endure, you have to be loyal, you have to persevere for you to get your PhD at the end of the year. It is not how intelligent you are, but it is how you can persevere …* (SPh, 5).

> *I engaged, we attended seminars together, presented, we shared ideas, we shared, we mentored each other. Sometimes …, I would go to their offices and I would say I am not good at this and we would help each other…with my peers … it was very good* (SPh4).

> *So, I have learned sometimes it is not also good to live isolated like an island, it is good also to relate to other colleagues because you may think you are alone, but you share the same experiences* (SPh5).

Such spaces suggest inclusion, practice, and institutionalisation as imperative for the improvement of PhD supervision. Peer groups provide practical support beyond the PhD and is thus crucial in PhD studies. Such approaches and practices should be strengthened where they exist and tried out where they do not exist. Generally, working in groups or cohorts, as pointed out in Chapters two and nine, is beneficial to both doctoral students and supervisors.

However, it seems that the pressure of undertaking doctoral education, could result in health challenges, as reported by two students:

> *I have … have seen some even having medical attention because of depression. I know of a colleague and am not mentioning the name from another university who had a stroke because of… PhD pressure. It had taken long; it had taken a toll on that individual and at the end the individual was hospitalised.* (SPh5).

(ii) Understanding each student and his/her point of departure

Supervision at doctoral level can also be significantly improved if supervisors take time to understand their students as individuals and see things from student perspectives. This participant notes that a supervisor:

> *[A supervisor]must be a visionary, he/she must see where the ball is going to land, then, you must walk to that point, you must walk from where the candidate is, not from where you are, you must go down to the candidate and assist the candidate develop from his own perspective* (Charisma).

As this participant points out, improved supervision practices can only be achieved if supervisors are empathetic and share the students' research vision. But this also implies that

supervisors may try to deflect students' perspectives in their own favour, leaving the student in a more precarious state, where he/she must struggle to share in the supervisor's research vision. However, I need to point out that such views from this supervisor may be influenced by other factors such as student ability, the disciplinary areas, the level of research at global perspective, and research topics, and whether, the student's research is part of a larger research project under the supervisor's docket. Accounts about the need for supervisors to understand the nature of students also highlights the notion that supervisors need to acknowledge students as normal human beings with other commitments. That would be a starting point in supervision improvement in South Africa: *'I think we should first become academic mentors and then acknowledge that the student has a personal life outside of academia'* (Charisma). Understanding individual students goes beyond getting to know their abilities (intellectual weakness and strength) to their social, cultural, and economic aspects of life. Again, this participant's perception can be achieved when a supervisor assumes and learns new roles that Cross and Atinde (2015, p.309) refer to as "compensatory capital", which includes skills such as coping mechanisms among doctoral supervisors and PhD students.

As pointed out in Chapter ten, some students may have challenges (physical, visual, or medical) that may influence how supervisors relate and work with them. From my field notes in an interview with Hilda, a participant in this study, explained that one of the students she supervised was visually impaired. The effect was that she had to work with an interpreter most of the time. Generally, improving doctoral supervision in South Africa requires that supervisors not only understand their students but also get the necessary support to deal with such students.

(iii) Allowing for adequate flexibility in supervision encounters

Doctoral studies are driven by a passion for a topic or research problem in a discipline or a set of related disciplines. It is in these research areas that PhD students see themselves as located. Additionally, depending on their background and dispositions, it may take persuasion to have them abandon or move in a new direction. This dimension of doctoral supervision needs improvement. For these participants, allowing doctorates to reign in their research topics, can greatly improve relationships and supervision in general:

> *There is need to accommodate diversity in terms of perspectives, opinions, and paradigms. I would …say that the supervisors do away with this concept of wanting to monopolise knowledge. No one has a monopoly of knowledge. Knowledge is progressive, knowledge in the modern society is socially constructed, because you find that you know some of these supervisors* (lowers the tone as if someone - his supervisor- is eavesdropping),*also don't read, they try to recycle some old ideas. So, I would also…. recommend that they try to read in areas that their students are interested in if they are not familiar with them instead of dissuading them into areas, they [supervisors] are interested in because they are not familiar with those areas. Because more often, you will find that students are the ones who …toe the line. You have to detour; you have to detour (*a long sarcastic laughter*) because if you keep on this course you won't get it* (SPh2).

> *Usually the other impediment is that you… they don't allow you to be your own self. You can't express yourself most of the time it happens when you finish. You find that your voice is very low, your voice is very low* (this point receives a lot of stress, accompanied by a disappointed facial expression). *And the voice of the supervisor, you*

express the voice of the supervisor. Everything you get cut and pulled out because the supervisors is very famous and will not allow you as a student to put your voice even if they are expecting you of it. But you are striving to become an expert so you... They must allow you to run with your work not that they determine what your work should be and how it should be (SPh 4).

(Laughing) *at times we have got different ideas. At times when supervisors tell us things, they take their own sides and never listen on our sides. When I have written a chapter, I would have done some research. So, at times the supervisors should not take the advantage that am just an empty box that has got to be poured water in to. They must also listen to what I must have said. They must read what I have done and so on. Not to just condemn the work that I have just done because after doing some research I would have done some research and worked very hard. So, at times we are given outright not the work that we have done. At times, it becomes very discouraging. Although they are there to supervise but at the same time they must know of the individual differences. If we are told to write on one topic we cannot just go in the same direction. At times, the supervisors have got their ways… their sides and they see in the direction in which student is going. Not to just being on their own sides to say that this is the direction that… this is the direction that is to be taken by the student. They must look at the side that I am taking and weigh the advantages and its disadvantages. Not just to give outright statements and say we are going in the wrong direction. At times, they must listen to why I think I have done it the way I have done it. And then from there we can discuss. Not to just look on their side and say no this is not right* (SPh6).

These sentiments are shared by this supervisor, who prefers to be called a promoter, rather than a supervisor:

> *I am promoting what the candidate is bringing to the table. So, you can hear what my angle of inclination is…yes, I do intervene at a certain stage, but it is the candidate that dictates the way to work. And supervisors … promoters… tend to think that it is their studies, it is not my study, I have got my own research, so you must demarcate what the student project is, or the candidates' project is on with [your] own academic life. I know they must interfere but to assist students to walk the way* (Charisma).

PhD students are of the opinion that there should be some form of understanding particularly, in the beginning of the student's research topic and interest with the supervisor. This is crucial because sources of research topics are varied and contextually bound. The data revealed that some students had suppressed feelings of having been overly dominated from the beginning to the end. Most of them live wondering whether they ultimately researched on what they set out to, or what supervisors determine in the process of supervision. On the other hand, supervisors are caught in between two issues: first, they must mediate knowledge development in their disciplinary areas, as reflected by students' topics, and the intellectual expectations of the doctorate and second, deal with a more complex challenge of establishing students' abilities and guiding them.

(iv) Ensuring regularity of feedback, meetings, and time for supervision

Nearly all the doctoral students stated that provision of resources, frequency of meetings, timely feedback and adequate time for supervision can greatly improve doctoral

supervision. In addition, it was felt that supervisors would provide explicit direction to the source and kind of literature to be reviewed.

> *Don't just supervise by giving feedback…they are experts, they know which material is relevant, [they should] guide you towards it. That would be awesome. Don't just give feedback, [tell the student to] use this book, this one, it is like a pillar, it would be fantastic, because sometimes we can spend longer hours in the library, you don't know which book to use, which one is a key theory to use…* (SPh 1).

As pointed out in Chapters eight and nine, issues of regularity and time can be psychologically costly to both PhD students and supervisors. For students, timely feedback is essential for they have a fixed completion time and may not have the funds to meet the costs of an extended doctoral programme.

> *[I Wanted] my supervisor to meet me regularly at a fixed time in terms of regularity. If it is Thursday, we meet every Thursday at a particular point and time* (SPh5).

At the same time, it is important for both PhD students and their supervisors to know that feedback should also come from peers, seminars, joint supervision meetings, and supervision committee meetings in a well-organised supervision meeting. This enables the learner to view this feedback critically, make informed decisions in relation to the topic and whether to reject or use it to advance research. This can greatly improve the nature and quality of doctoral supervision. However, as pointed out earlier, ways of improving PhD supervision are drawn from individual student's experiences and supervisors. Some supervisors feel that

PhD students should be allowed time to explore a whole set of literature and decide, autonomously, what is beneficial for their research.

(v) Addressing issues of race and intimidation in supervision

There is a tendency among some PhD students, out of their own observations, to link race and nationality issues to supervision in South Africa. The issue of race cannot be underestimated in South African context because of the legacy of apartheid and other forms of discrimination in post-apartheid South Africa, where the remnants of apartheid remain vivid. Students advocate for equal treatment of doctoral students regardless of race, creed, or nationality and this can significantly improve doctoral supervision. A PhD student in his sixth year painfully and articulately explained:

> *Because, they…the level of discrepancies is really a cause for concern, is…is one you know, how do you explain two different students in the same faculty or same department, one starts…takes 5 years, one takes 2 years one takes 3 years- all full time! I think I have a feeling that I noticed this from experience, there was a racial component in the supervision of doctoral students. I am sorry to say this but I …yes you will notice that most white students in the whole departments in the faculty (of education) take a very short period of time to complete their PhDs. I know some students that came…. I know I tutored them when they were doing their honour's, they moved on to their masters' and they joined us in the PhD programme and completed before myself and other colleagues who they found doing doctorate. For, for anyone to say that they are cleverer than the Blacks who are here, to me* (along sarcastic and sardonic laughter) *is to me neither here nor there. But I think it also depends on the way the Black supervisors' scaffold their Black students' counter parts, you compare*

to you know, I think I don't know whether to say white supervisors tend to afford more time and resources to white students. Because there is a serious discrepancy in this university, particularly in this department. If you check, you find, find there are some PhD students who are White, they don't spend three years here. The longest they can stay here is three years. Most of them finish in two years as if to say, Whites are more intelligent than Blacks…. (SPh2).

Another PhD student noted that: *'I don't know …. but White PhD students take a short time to graduate on this campus than us'* (SPh5). Although some of the Black international students are caught in the maze of racial discontent, as reported here, my own observation revealed that most of the students who participated in this study had either Black or White supervisors and had been enrolled for more than four years. But a Black South African PhD student, who had been on campus for more than five years doing a PhD had a different and surprising opinion about supervision. Noting that even within South Africa, local students cannot be compared to those students from the rest of Africa. This student was categorical but apologetic:

You know I cannot compare [South Africans], I am sorry to mention people who come from other parts of Africa because they succeed because they have no choice and have mastered the art of survival and studies (SPh4).

It is not preferential treatment that leads to early completion. Although students' opinions may be laced with intense subjectivities and hard feelings about their stay and experiences on campus, their views seem to resonate with Westbury's (1998, p.15) assertion that "how learning is organized, perceived, and debated are always rooted in the particularities of

national histories, habits, and national aspiration". At the doctoral supervision level, modalities should be put in place to eliminate racial discrimination in supervision encounters so that all students are treated equally in order to be successful within the doctoral programme.

(vi) Enhancing strategies for supervisor management

Enhancing supervisor management strategies can also improve doctoral supervision in South Africa. Doctoral supervisors, who have trained in Europe, know that PhD students can manage their supervisors. One participant noted that:

> *my supervisor made sure that I became part and parcel of the supervision. In other words, he made it very clear to me that he would like me to manage the process of supervision. It wasn't him who would determine the trajectory of my studies. After a few supervision encounters, he wanted me to take over the management of the supervision process in other words manage my own supervisor. He made that very clear to me. He wanted me to take control of that process* (Famous).

In this case, managing supervision ensures that the student is at the centre of the events in supervision encounters, this means setting the agenda of the action plan. This is explicitly explained by this participant.

> *I used to plan for my supervision session, taking the whole week planning for my supervision session because I only had an hour* (Hilda).

Managing the supervision process is therefore important in both social and intellectual relationships. Rugg and Petre (2004) argue that interactions between supervisors and their students should be managed. Those supervisors that are open to this process, empower and thus greatly improve the supervision process. The training capacity of a research supervisor at PhD level can go beyond the disciplinary knowledge. Halai (2011) notes that generally doctoral supervision has no training programme for academics involved. Efforts to improve doctoral supervision suggested by participants includes the following:

a) Supervision and mentoring

As pointed out earlier in Chapter eight, improving doctoral supervision is necessary for the success of the PhD student. Some students suggested that doctoral supervision should go beyond guiding and directing students to include mentoring. This is evident in this student's remark.

> *You know supervision .... I know that supervision is not a mystery but one thing that I believe in is that you hold a person, it is like showing a baby how to walk. I have never seen such people who do not, my last supervisor taught me the real word …scaffolding, how to scaffold a person to give support structure. Where you give support structures for a person to grow, to help and you become, you avail yourself for help. So, I think to be a mentor, you mentor literary it means you take the person by hand and show how it is done and take the person to the winning post. That is how supervision should be* (SPh4).

Thus, supervision involves not only offering a support framework but being considerate, committed, understanding, caring, and sensitive to psycho-social needs of the PhD candidates.

> *Let me say being considerate is number one then followed by caring and the spirit of empathy, so that those are the things that they should know …, know and understand your student and what makes them tick. Help them and make them understand their thinking … you know, supervise to develop …, supervise to build, supervise for growth and you know sometimes you supervise because you want to help a person grow emotionally, socially, especially intellectually, so you accompany the person. So, it means 'wena' you accompany them* (SPh 4).

This student believes supervision can only be improved if there is a *'change of perception by the people concerned…the supervisors themselves should change their perceptions about what they are doing to students'* (SPh5). This remark suggests that supervisors should reflect on their practice and understand what is done to the students as they guide them through the process.

Mentoring the current doctoral students in the field of education as a supervision improvement strategy is necessary. Mentoring takes place when it is perceived as:

> A teaching and learning process in a one on one career development relationship between two individuals where one serves as the teacher and counsellor, on the basis of his or her experience, professional status, and credentials, and having gone through a similar experience **(**Mda, 2013, p.94).

While many meanings of mentoring exist, the one in this encounter is unique and deals with knowledge creation, cohort, and the emerging emotional support among students. Doctoral students should therefore accept that in mentoring, PhD supervisors can help them to develop and mature as researchers, to be honest in their research (Files, Blair, Mayer & Ko,

2008) in addition to remaining focused on knowledge production. Mentoring constitutes a first step towards PhD improvement. However, as participants consider this form of mentoring, more research is needed to investigate and understand what mentoring at PhD level includes in a world of global students with varying backgrounds.

b) Supervisor training programmes

Some PhD students are of the view that exposing supervisors to some training can significantly improve the process of supervision:

> *Supervisors themselves might need some workshops on supervision so that we can see some uniformity. Right now, to be honest with you…there are students from the same faculty or even from the same university supervised by … different supervisors have different stories to tell. There is no clear-cut supervision culture* (SPh2).

> *That there is no school for supervision. There is no course for supervision, people just learn and create ways to become doctoral supervisors without a theoretical base and in other words you try to refer to your days when you were a PhD student, how you were supervised and try to emulate that in helping students to become… a supervisor… they do ask around how do we help these people [PhD students] and stuff like that. There is no school for supervision, there is no course for supervision* (SPh3).

> *I think, I think universities, faculties and departments must design a clear-cut modus operandi of how supervision should be conducted* (SPh 2).

Given the contemporary value of doctoral education, some basic training of what constitutes common practices in doctoral studies can positively impact doctoral supervision. Doctoral students have suggestions for how doctoral supervision can be improved in South African universities. Surprisingly, their perceptions about improving supervision at doctoral level seem to focus on what supervisors ought to do rather than what both students and supervisors should do. Such reactions are typical of subjectivities constructed over time by students who only see with a one-track mindset. These reactions also represent the lived experiences drawn from individual supervision encounters and told by people who believe they should have completed their studies earlier. Although these candidates seem to have vested hopes of improving doctoral supervision in training supervisors, there are some aspects such as establishing relationships and working with students that may not necessarily depend on formal supervision training.

11.6 Conclusion

This chapter suggests ways in which doctoral supervision can be improved in South Africa and argues that improvement of doctoral supervision should take a multipronged approach, with students, supervisors and those in management being at the epicentre. I argued that despite the challenges in supervising doctorates in South Africa, the process of supervision can be improved. Improving PhD supervision, as it relates to individual relationships between students and supervisors, the working context of supervisors and the general perception of supervision, was a key feature emerging from the data.

Participants were of the view that if Deans and HODs are more involved in the process, in policy formulation *vis-à-vis* supervision, introducing course work and getting more

support rather than the punitive role played directly and indirectly by the management, supervision can greatly improve. More critical in improving the process is to introduce and establish seminars, small and large groups as well as formal and informal meetings in which both supervisors and students can share supervision experiences. Most students felt that supervision could be improved if there was increased research interaction. They also pointed out that progress can be made if supervisors maintained regular and timely feedback, coupled with regular meetings.

Supervision should be a mentoring process, akin to both students' intellectual development and other aspects of social, historical, and cultural life. Supervision is needed to improve the supervision process. Having examined how doctoral supervision can be improved in this chapter, I construct a conclusive encounter of pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South Africa in Chapter twelve of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Conclusions and recommendations

12.1 The study focus

The main aim of this study was to explore and understand how university lecturers supervise doctoral students in the contexts of South African universities. The reason for this is because the place and role of a doctorate degree in contemporary society has heightened debates on what comprises the quality and nature of training doctoral graduates. Amid such debates, this study sought to investigate the pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities. In conducting this investigation, I paid attention to two critical issues: firstly, the people involved in the supervision, particularly how they are constituted and secondly, the context within which doctoral supervisors operates in South Africa. It became apparent that the interweaving of contexts and individual constitutions combine to produce contestations, tensions, and contradictions that are one needs to be critically aware of in the training of doctoral students.

12.2 Revisiting the main research question and the central argument

This study set out to investigate the question: *How do university lecturers supervise doctoral students in diverse contexts prevalent in doctoral education in South African universities?* I therefore conceptualised the main question in form of the following sub-questions:

a) What are the prevalent supervision practices in doctoral education in South African universities?

b) What discourses and contextual imperatives underpin these practices?

c) How can PhD research supervision under the diverse learning conditions of South African universities be improved?

In undertaking the study, the above-mentioned questions provided the insights that allowed me the opportunity to interrogate the practice of supervision, the people who supervise, the students, and the context in which they operate.

I argue that doctoral supervision is a function of multiple and complex factors that make it a problematic engagement to understand. In this case, the argument pursued in this study posits that the challenges current supervisors face in their practice are multiple. One is the contextual complexities and peculiarities concerning the environment in which it takes place. Two, the local and global issues related to transformation, social, cultural redress, governance conditions, as well as dynamics in the nature and role of knowledge contribute to the complexity of the environment. This is because the conflicting models of supervision fail to account for these complexities and there is a need for re-contextualisation of supervision models. Third, the profile of current doctoral candidates in South African context is not complete without incorporating mentoring and other forms of academic socialisation into practice. Thus, in such environments, mentoring cannot be separated from supervision, diversification of experiences, and preparation of PhD students. To achieve the main objective of the study, the interpretive qualitative inquiry used a case study design. Using multiple data collection methods – interviews, observation, field notes and literature review, as discussed in

Chapter four and presented in the various data chapters, I revisit the questions above and reflect on some of the issues that arose.

12.3 Key theoretical insights from the study

12.3.1 Supervision practices in doctoral education

Doctoral supervision practices vary depending on supervisors, faculty policies and management. The literature review revealed that several models, including the one-on-one, co-supervision, semi-cohort models, and the doctoral/PhD committee were utilised in the universities that participated in the study. While most supervisors preferred and operated on a one-on-one model, the two institutions had developed doctoral committees and what I later described as a '*contingent semi-cohort model'* as a way of improving doctoral supervision and experience. This was a response to the weakness that the one-on-one and co-supervision models seemed to have on the practice, as revealed by literature. Nevertheless, all the models reviewed had strength and weaknesses. In South Africa, the one-on-one model of supervision was found to be the most common model of supervision (ASSAF, 2010; Backhouse, 2009; Dietz, Jansen & Wadee, 2006).

Within these models of supervision, a variety of strategies were deployed by supervisors to develop the knowledge and skills of PhD student, such as seminars, small and large group discussions, lectures, presentations, and class projects. What I described as '*collective mediation strategy*' was critical in training students from different year groups in issues that commonly arise during the research process, as well as addressing the issue of loneliness sometimes experienced in doctoral studies. However, these strategies are

influenced by other factors such as whether the PhD student is employed, the discipline and the department (context) where the student is enrolled.

In training doctoral students, supervisors have to be knowledgeable in their respective discipline, as well as in academic writing, critical thinking, and other social skills that are mostly informal but critical during supervision engagements. However, the literature revealed that supervisors either learnt how to supervise doctoral student through personal experience as PhD students themselves or through supervisor development programmes. Although these programmes are well intended, most supervisors are of the view that they focus more on structural and administrative issues and assume, without appropriate research, that supervisors are lacking in certain dimensions of supervision. It thus emerged that training was more to do with administration issues than equipping supervisors with the relevant knowledge and skills vital for effective supervision.

12.3.2 Discourses and contextual imperatives underpinning doctoral supervision

This section pays attention to the issues that arose in response to the first objective of the study. In focusing on this question, Chapters six, seven, eight and nine are addressed.

a) Supervisor profiles and the background

The study showed that as PhD students, supervisors were exposed to highly qualified supervisors, who not only allowed them to manage their supervisors, but also engaged them in contentious and critical contexts (social and academic) that left students confident and assertive. The study found that issues of friendship in supervision relationships needed careful attention. Within the matrix of interaction, the current supervisors accumulated multiple (strategies/models) frameworks of supervision that coalesced from personal experiences and

environment in which they were supervised. Individual experience reflection showed an affinity for academia, personal ambition, and the popular view at higher education institutions that every PhD holder should supervise PhD students. Nevertheless, how the current supervisors engage with students is partly a function of PhD student abilities. Regardless of the nature of their experiences as PhD students, current supervisors experienced difficult times during supervision. Cases of dropping students or threatening to walk out are reminiscent of such experiences.

b) Supervising the first student: experiences of novice supervisors

Having examined supervisor experiences and what prompted them to become doctoral supervisors, I realised that experiences with their first PhD students would provide some insight into the pedagogical experiences at the doctoral level. But the experience of most supervisors was to acquire formal skills critical for successful entry into professional careers that call for highly specialised knowledge and skills (Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001).

In this study, junior supervisors identified some of the least expected pedagogical difficulties that confronted them at the onset of their careers. These included being allocated [students not up to par], fear, lack of experience and confidence, power play, credit for supervising, the challenge of managing students and experienced co-supervisors as well as being allocated rejected students. Generally, insecurity, dependence or reliance on experienced supervisors coupled with powerlessness in the choice of students, were key attributes defining junior supervisors.

Whether these aspects were framed and executed by the department or faculty or whether it is a natural formation in which individual habituses have to adjust, is not clear.

This foreshadows the need for knowledge and skills beyond the specialised knowledge and skills, that is, extra skills in general socialisation and communication, critical thinking (Davidson, 1998; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001), work and industry relationships, which are critical as they guide PhD students (Tyler, 1998). Experiences revealed by supervisors were indicative of the kind of environment that they would continually work in (some supervisors had these experiences in Europe, where they had first started their careers). Besides, some of these practices are covertly institutionalised in cases where training, orientation and integration of junior supervisors is rarely found. Nevertheless, it becomes clear to novice supervisors that there is more to directing doctoral students beyond focusing on research areas, topic, and discipline. Certainly, supervisors need some training in doctoral supervision beyond the academic space. However, in the absence of system training or capacity building programmes, supervision practices are shaped by past experiences, under someone else's supervision.

c) Student profiles, backgrounds, and supervision experiences

In this study, the data revealed that current doctoral student profile and backgrounds had diverse and motivating reasons for PhD enrolment and varied levels and types of preparations. It was apparent that most students relied on their masters' qualification, yet not much preparation was made in relation to the expected academic requirements at doctoral level. As mentioned in Chapter five, this pattern is partly an indication of inadequate information about what doctoral education entails, as spelt out in the participating schools/faculty's brochure. For instance, pointing at empowerment, domination, and prestige as motivation in the study, obscures the process of achieving states of being.

Student supervision experiences varied greatly depending on their supervisors' mode of working. Practices such as changing supervisors based on their specialty, punctuality, working with or without any problems and student expectations were crucial in making decisions related to supervision. Naturally, students at masters' level form certain expectations in relation to their careers that are tied to completion time of the PhD, supervision experiences and the people who supervise them. These expectations are imprinted during their studies through literature and a general understanding of the PhD studies at local and global level. However, individual experiences and incongruence between way of working in the supervision process, and students, and the nature of doctoral studies formed identities and expectations at the masters' level intersect, making the tensions and contestations inevitable. This pattern suggests the need for clarifying certain aspects of doctoral education, particularly pedagogical experiences in relation to both PhD students, supervisor identities and background experiences.

d) Doctoral supervision practices in South Africa universities

How lecturers supervise doctoral students is influenced by numerous factors. Evidence for this aspect was presented in Chapter nine. The study found that there was no cast in iron way of supervising an individual PhD student. How supervision was framed by individual supervisors was first exemplified in their narratives about their own experiences as PhD students. The study identified one-on-one, co-supervision and the cohort models of supervision as the main supervision models deployed by doctoral supervisors in South African universities. The one-on-one model, according to the evidence provided in Chapter nine, is employed mainly because most supervisors are specialised and experienced in certain disciplines, thus reinforcing views by Halse and Bansel (2012) and Jemeson and Naidoo (2007). Other contextual factors that determined the model of supervision included student

abilities, their background, the initial meetings PhD students had with their supervisors and the authoritative nature of the conversations in which they engaged. In some cases, supervisors, having specialised in particular areas and methodologies, found that there was a need to work with another supervisor when topics cut across fields or disciplines and methods. If supervisors and PhD students can level the ground in the initial discussions such as identifying the nature, practices, and characteristics of supervision at PhD level, this could be the beginning of the creation of a more free/liberal supervision space.

Sometimes supervisors also engage in co-supervision. Engagement in this model, as evidenced in Chapter nine, was based on differences in specialties, the fact that one supervisor *'can't be on top of everything you say in the PhD'* (Leah), and the fact that upcoming supervisors tended to lack confidence in working without a co-supervisor, make the case for the model. This aligns with Spooner-Lane, *et.al.* (2007); Nightingale (2005); Phillips and Pugh (1987) and Moses (1984) assertions on co-supervision. I also established that some co-supervisors had reformed their supervision tactics and met their students together for feedback after thoroughly reviewing and reflecting on each other's comments. The study also established that those who participated in co-supervision encounters also learnt from their colleagues and their PhD students. However, supervisors indicated that for some reason, such as performance culture (indicators), specialisation in specific disciplines, sharing responsibilities and issues of power (intellectual, experience, position) among other things and inadequate spirit of teamwork in South African context, could undermine this model of supervision.

Supervisors also adopted *a contingent semi-cohort* model of supervision. This model, far from the ordinary cohort model was adopted by supervisors, integrating both doctoral,

masters' and honours' students. Those who participated most were doctoral students. The approach focused on public presentation and critiquing of postgraduate student research. Among those who attended were also smaller groups that worked under a single supervisor, adopting a similar format. This new approach reduced solitude and limited or widened of scope of individual student's work associated with postgraduate student research (ASSAF, 2010; Burnett, 1999). Generally, in a context where there is no course work at the doctoral level, the impression given is that supervisors design ways of meeting the social needs of PhD students, in addition to the core intellectual needs. At the same time, certain skills such as presentations skills, confidence and preparation for presentation can best be inculcated through such settings.

In the Faculty of Education at UJ, the infrastructure for the use of a PhD committee as part of the supervision model for doctoral studies has been established. Although the model brings together several supervisors and a PhD student, there is a mismatch between its operations and the human dynamics in its formations. Supervisors indicated that without commitment, proper organisation, constitution of the committee, and the fact that the last word on student's work rests with the PhD students' main supervisor, seem to undermine the purpose of the doctoral committee. PhD students, too, observed that the model was extremely unpopular and ineffective, particularly when they learned that the last word rested with their supervisors. However, beyond these models of supervision, conferences, questioning, reading, and writing centres, and writing retreats were viewed as productive pedagogical strategies for doctoral supervision.

In Chapter ten, I argued that contestations and tensions that characterise doctoral supervision are reflective of the PhD student, supervisors, and the context within which they

operate. In this regard, supervisor and student expectations found behind these expectations come to the fore. Concurrently, influence of the context and its contribution to the tensions in the supervision encounter is played out. Attention was given to the nature of support provided by the department to both PhD students and supervisors. Drawing from the evidence given, it is possible to argue that inadequate support given to supervisors contributed to the tensions and contestations between supervisors and PhD students. For instance, inadequate support from HODs and what seems to be lack of clarity on the part of students about the quality of a thesis as a tool for power and control, is a contributory issue. Students' attempts to submit a thesis which is deemed poor quality work is countered by highly qualified supervisors who operate in a context governed by high quality work, done within the framework spelt out by the department for the institution. In some cases, when a department fails to provide information, the faculty fills this gap, either by regulating student or supervisor conduct on specific supervision issues or spelling out the required way. Stepping in at this level, shows clearly how the context of supervision enhances the operation of power in the process of doctoral supervision.

Issues of feedback, delays, and compliance with supervisor's way of working were significant. PhD students indicated that most supervisors did not give them feedback on time, leading to a protracted delay. In some cases, students resorted to complying with the supervisor's way of doing things while others defied the odds and changed supervisors in the hope of having better experiences. In my study for instance, only two supervisors indicated that they frequently and quickly responded to student work. In fact, the way feedback is given to students also reflects on a supervisor's own experience and general philosophy of teaching. Evidence from the study indicates that some supervisors shared, without the student's knowledge, the feedback they gave to PhD students. As a result, such supervisory practices

lower student confidence, morale, and zeal to carry on with the PhD under the same supervisor.

e) Improving doctoral supervision in South Africa

Chapter eleven of the thesis attempted, through interviews to discuss ways in which the current supervision can be improved. In this dimension, I found that the ways to improve supervision was a function of the supervision context, practice of supervision and the supervisors' capacity to supervise. Contextually, participants felt that Deans and HODs should not only be more involved in the process by clarifying the rules and regulations of PhD supervision, but also provide a supportive role. As for the practice of PhD supervision, introduction of course work and understanding of each student's needs would, among other things, be the starting point to an improved supervision practice. PhD students also feel that supervisors should allow them more liberty to pursue their own topics and the need for more frequent meetings and feedback from/with their supervisors as a way of improving the practice.

The general argument suggests that while doctoral supervisors play a significant role in doctoral education, supervision of doctoral students is not a simple, predictable and easily determined pedagogical engagement as reflected in most of the literature. The models of supervision seem to overlook some critical issues surrounding the doctoral process. The data showed that doctoral supervision is a complex process that involves an interplay of personal and contextual factors. Personal factors relate to the way PhD students and PhD supervisors are constituted (their background and profiles) while contextual factors are either related to disciplinary/interdisciplinary dynamics or institutional practices as well as trends in regional or global practices in doctoral education, particularly in supervision. Thus, what emerges from

this study is a complex and more distinctive picture of doctoral supervision that is removed from the essentialist inclinations of doctoral supervision.

12.4 Contributions made by the study

This study makes several empirical and theoretical contributions to research in doctoral supervision. Given that the nature of supervision (and teaching in general) is, most of the time, a verbal engagement, done in private, as was mentioned in Chapter two, this study showed that "it [was] possible or desirable to seek to go beyond, into the realms of the unspoken and the unsayable?" (Green, 2005, p.158). In this study, a lot of the unspoken was articulated in this private space of doctoral supervision. The study, drawing from interviews with doctoral students who were writing up their research and supervisors who had been supervising doctorates for more than ten years, offers detailed descriptions, analysis, and discussions about their experiences of during supervision encounters.

At the conceptual level, I figured out that the competing discourses about the concept of supervision and its meaning not only influences how it is done but also what the process involves. While studies in other parts of the world focus on supervision in view of producing academics, this study shows that the process should take a wider view to incorporate the interests of other stakeholders. Considering this, although studies show that supervisors usually supervise doctorates the way they were supervised, this study established that modes of supervision that were considered improper or ineffective were either dropped by the current supervisors or adapted to fit into the context of current supervision practices. At the same time, the lives of supervisors, as beginners in the craft of supervision, revealed extreme challenges (managerial, denial of credit, and being assigned students who were not up to par) as a form of initiation into doctoral supervision.

Another contribution made by this study relates to the sources of tensions and contests that arise between doctoral students and their supervisors. Using Bourdieu's cultural capital tools (habitus and cultural capital), I established that most tensions arose between supervisors and PhD students mainly because of incongruence of their varied backgrounds and profiles and those of their supervisors. The evidence provided by the interviews indicated a habitual way of doing things (supervision) at masters' level by PhD students. This constituted a certain person, formed by the masters' research experience which eventually translates into the development of identity as they further their studies. Students and their supervisors engage in silent learning and adoption of marginal knowledge, unfamiliar to them but eventually too helpful to be ignored, that is, "compensatory capital" (Cross & Atinde, 2015). At the same time, students prepare for doctoral studies not based on the pedagogical experiences at doctoral level, but rather on their qualifications at masters' level and financial abilities.

While the study confirmed the continued dominance of the one-on-one model of doctoral supervision, it identified the context of doctoral supervision as a crucial factor that has over time been engrained in South African universities. Discipline, student abilities, performance indicators and how supervisors were trained play out utilising the one-on-one model of supervision. Within these models of supervision, I proposed the *contingent semi-cohort* model of supervision as a way forward for the faculties and schools of education in South Africa where different masters' and doctoral students with their supervisors meet, present, and discuss their research.

Given the fast-changing social-economic context and the role of doctoral education in this context, the South African government and other stakeholders have developed a deeper interest in quality and type of doctoral graduates produced by universities. Specifically, the

concept of knowledge economy is pushing for diverse knowledge and skills among doctoral graduates. Thus, within the scope of transformation in South African education, this study also suggests that universities/faculties/schools/departments should not only restructure their doctoral programmes to meet the needs of the contemporary world, but also design ways of ensuring that supervisors develop supervision skills and knowledge that effectively meet these needs.

In addition, it should be noted that higher levels of education call for different pedagogical practices and new identities. In this case, students finishing the masters' programmes should be empowered with a well-formed academic identity, which defines the way postgraduates should be taught, including doctoral students. The carried-forward identity stimulates tensions and contestations between supervisors and PhD students with regard students' expectations as to how they should be supervised. It should be noted that this earlier identity affected the supervision process. Thus, I propose that students should be sensitised both during their masters' programmes and PhD experiences about the need to *alter*, develop or rebrand (learning experiences) their identity to cope with doctoral studies.

12.5 Final remarks

When I started doing this study, PhD colleagues often told me that it was an interesting area but wondered how I could collect data from doctoral supervisors. Some went ahead and suggested that they would be available to participate in the study – even before I had defined and structured the selection criteria. This level of enthusiasm among PhD students constitutes the context within which supervision of doctorates takes place. But having engaged with supervisors and PhD students in the course of data collection, I came to

terms with the fact that supervision of doctorates is a conversation that is long overdue. I therefore hope for a dialogue between doctoral students and their colleagues about who they are (and have been) and how they can work harmoniously between supervisors and the management, and what they expect to be a more effective doctoral supervision model. Discussions about the contemporary need for adjustments according to the context in which students and supervisors work should be addressed at selected fora as a way of understanding that doctoral supervision can be diluted by personal and contextual factors. However, an understanding of the persons who supervise PhDs and the context of supervision is a pipe dream. Different people engage in this programme as supervisors at different times with varying social, economic, and political factors. I hope in a world where marketing clarifies several things, issues of context and the general practices in doctoral supervision will slowly be communicated to all stakeholders as a way of providing an understanding of how contexts play a crucial role in academic space. In the process, all the participants and stakeholders will start understanding the dynamics involved in doctoral supervision and how each stakeholder can help universities to change the process of supervision.

12.6 Areas for further studies

This study focused on two universities: a university and a comprehensive university, omitting universities of technology. This scope of cases does not really reflect the general nature of universities, doctoral students, and supervision practices in South African universities therefore it is imperative to widen the scope and make recommendations that can be generalised. Other faculties and departments as well as universities of technologies should be included in the discourse – specifically in natural science departments where supervision practices may be different from those in humanities and social sciences. Within the

Department of Education, further studies could focus on humanities and science education to draw a comparison in supervision experiences and bring new insights into these areas of doctoral supervision, specifically in the Department of Education. Secondly, the study did not include the viewpoints of those who had graduated from these institutions to better understand how supervision, valuable skills and knowledge were inculcated. These viewpoints can be investigated to establish the pedagogies of doctoral studies and the related skills after graduating. Third, this part of the study was grossly limited by time. In this regard, there is need for an investigation into this dimension of doctoral supervision. Generally, more research in the mentioned areas is needed to inform the practice of doctoral supervision.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

P.O. BOX 524 AUCKLAND PARK KINGSWAY 2006

Dear Participant/Supervisor

Research topic/project: Pedagogies of doctoral supervision in South African universities

I would kindly like to invite/request you to participate in the research project mentioned above. The main aim of this research project is to explore and understand how university lecturers supervise doctoral students in diverse contexts prevalent in doctoral education in South African universities. The focus is on doctoral supervisors and PhD students in faculties/schools of education in these universities.

More specifically, the study is interested in how doctoral supervisors are positioned to approach and deal with doctoral supervision amid varying and constantly changing environments. The study will be exploring the following issues; the concept of supervision, models of supervision, mediation strategies, preparation of supervisors and the influence of selected contextual factors on doctoral supervision.

Participation in this study is voluntary. More important however is that your name will not be required for use at any one point and all the information that you provide will be treated confidentially. Your responses will be anonymous and will not be disclosed to your colleagues, heads of department or faculty dean. Given that your participation is voluntary, you are at liberty to withdraw your participation at any stage of the investigation.

Since you have agreed to participate in this study as an interviewee, you will be interviewed by the researcher for a period of approximately 45 minutes between the Month of September 2013 and November 2014 at a time of the day convenient to you. The findings of the study will be published and made public to all those who may be interested.

This study will not put you or your professional life to any risk or inflict any form of side effects on you as a person. At any one point should you feel affected in any way because of participating in this study or think that your privacy was to any extent violated, kindly treat it with the urgency it deserves by contacting Mr. Akala Ungadi Cell No. 0745437730.

If you are willing to participate, contact me on my email address: bernardakala@gmail.com. In your response, kindly please provide your contact details and possible dates and times you can be available for me to arrange for an interview with you.

Yours sincerely,

Benard Akala Ungadi.

APPENDIX 2

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

FACUTLY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

RESEARCH TOPIC: PEDAGOGIES OF DOCTORAL SUPERVISION IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR PhD SUPERVISORS

RESEARCH QUESTION: ***How do university lecturers supervise doctoral students in diverse contexts in South African universities?***

Biographical/background information

1. **Experience as a PhD student**: *Perhaps we may begin by you telling me about your experiences as a PhD student about your (interaction, relationship, approaches).*

Probing questions

- What were some of your most memorable and lowest moments and how did you resolve them?
- What do you think of your supervisor today, many years after you completed your PhD?
- How would you compare your experiences as a PhD student and how you supervise your students today?
- Was being able to supervise other students one of the objectives of PhD programme during your time? Say more.

2. **Becoming a postgraduate supervisor:** Kindly please tell me how you developed interest *in supervision, the key factors, individuals, or experiences that attracted you and keep you in this practice.*

Probing questions

- How has been your experience as a PhD supervisor?
- So far, what lessons have you learnt from your experience?
- What other forms of socialization/experiences do you think shaped your interest into the practice of supervision?

3. Experience with the first PhD student: *Your first PhD student marked an important stage in your career as a supervisor. What outstanding things do you remember about your first PhD student? (Refer to the student, the research area, the discipline, the department, and yourself).*

Probing questions

- What were your highest and lowest moments during the entire time of supervision?
- Comment on that student with regard to how he/she enabled your career as a supervisor.
- How would you describe the profiles of your most difficult student and the student you enjoyed supervising most? Why these differences?

4. *What other responsibilities are you engaged in and how do they impact on your role as a supervisor?*

Probing question

- Out of your experience, would you advise supervisors to take up such responsibilities on campus?

5. *How would you describe the levels of preparedness (nature) of PhD students you have supervised prior to their admission?*

Probing questions

- Are there particular areas of weakness in this regard among PhD students? Why?
- From your experience, why do you think you're your students enrol for PhD?

- Some students are admitted to PhD programme as part of the implementation of affirmative action policy. *Comment on this issue with regard to the suitability of the people to pursue PhDs.* Over time, what do your students say about how your approach to supervision? How do you get to know this?

6. *How helpful has been your department been to you in your capacity as a supervisor?*

Probing questions

- Apart from students' results (masters) and submission of a draft proposal, what other parameters does the department use to ascertain the suitability of students admitted for PhD?
- From your experience, would you say that the admission criteria for PhD spells out the kind of learning that is required of the doctoral students (i.e. what PhD entails)?
- How is your department equipped to enhance PhD supervision? What should be done?

7. *Supervision has for a long time been disciplinary based. To what extent do you operate within your discipline as you supervise PhD students?*

Probing questions

- Share your experiences with regard to research areas/topics that cut across disciplines.
- To what extent are you involved in research projects and collaborations with other organizations? How do they shape the trends in you research area?
- How would you describe the trends in your discipline/area of specialization about the nature of knowledge?
- How do you work with your students to ensure that they keep their original topics/ideas?

8. *Major policy decisions about funding, publication, attending conferences with your students, affirmative action and admission are taken at the school/faculty or institutional level. Let me know how some of these policy statements impact/affect your work as a supervisor and the PhD students you supervise.*

Probing questions

- How does this relate to the claim by South African government that both lecturers (supervisors) and PhD students are not well exposed (academic exposure)? How does this happen?
- Briefly share with me your experience about supervising students from different social and racial backgrounds (affirmative action-policy).

9. *How would you describe the kind of PhD graduate that you produce in the world today (including the last decade)?*

Probing questions

- How do you determine the skills and knowledge you impart besides what is provided in the course outline?
- What other "things" do you do to produce a graduate with diverse skills?
- In your opinion, why are PhD graduates in South Africa despised by employers? What does that mean for you, students, and the university?
- Do you think the public should know what PhD entails?

10. How do you balance between the notion of *production of original* **knowledge** for a PhD and *providing a range of skills* for the market?

11. *Why do you think that South African government is concerned about the number and quality of PhDs produced annually?*

Probing questions

- What does this mean to you as a supervisor?
- As a supervisor, how are you involved in the development and production of government policies that regulate and inform doctoral studies?
- Why the low rate of graduation in South African universities?
- How do you motivate students to enrol for PhDs in your field of specialization? Do you make use of your current PhD students?

- South Africa wants to produce 100 PhDs per million by the year 2030 from the current 27/28 per million. How can this be done?

12. **Approaches to supervision:** *Having been in the practice of PhD supervision for a long time, how do you go about the* ***real*** *process of supervision?*

Probing questions

- Which other people do you involve in your supervision engagement and why?
- Why do you opt for certain approaches over others?
- Comment on how your peers influence your approach to supervision. What about your students?
- What has been the trend about PhD supervision approaches today and in future?

13. *PhD committees are central structures and approaches to PhD supervision. Share with me your experiences on this committee as a member.*

Probing questions

- How would you describe the place of a supervisor on this committee?
- Comment on its impact on the supervisor's relationship with students and willingness of committee members to provide support to students out of the committee session.
- What shortcomings have you picked from the various PhD committees that you have attended?
- How would you describe the future of PhD committees in (UJ) South Africa? How can this approach be improved?
- In your opinion, how do you think the PhD committee should operate?
- Comment on co-supervision. Why is there so much reluctance towards it? (Why can't it be declared the main model of supervision by the faculty?

14. **Mediation strategies:** *Critical thinking and academic writing are basic in PhD work. How do you train your candidates in these arenas?*

Probing questions

- Are there specific methods you find quite appropriate in imparting these skills?
- What influences the choice of approaches?
- Besides these two skills, which other aspects do you find challenging thus calling for different and unique mediation strategies?
- Would you say that PhD students are fully aware of what awaits them about writing and critical thinking as they enrol for their courses?
- Based on your experience, what then do you consider to be the major challenges of PhD supervision in South Africa.

15. **Resources/assets store for supervisors:** *Certainly, your experience as a PhD student has been an important resource for your current practice.*

16. Would you say that your experience as a PhD student is an important asset to your current practice as a supervisor? How?

Probing questions

- How would you explain your success (effectiveness) based on these resources in the contemporary society?
- Any other *weapon/secret* for successful supervision?

17. **The nature of the PhD:** *Share with me what you consider to be the current trends in doctoral supervision/education.*

Probing questions

- How do they affect your practice as a supervisor?
- How do you cope with this?
- How would you compare the nature of PhD in the world today and your time as a PhD student?

- South Africa does not produce adequate doctorates with quantitative/statistical skills and knowledge. *How can this be explained*?

18. **Staff development programmes:** *Supervisors are currently being encouraged to participate in staff development programmes. How do you regard these programmes?*

Probing questions

- How are training needs determined?
- Do you think that the students you supervise, examiners report and the submitted thesis play a role in determining your training needs? Expound on this.
- How have these programmes been implemented wherever you have been as a supervisor?
- Briefly describe your attitude towards these programmes. What do you think should be done?

APPENDIX 3

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

FACUTLY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM STUDIES

RESEARCH TOPIC: PEDAGOGIES OF DOCTORAL SUPERVISION IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

PhD STUDENTS' INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: APRIL/MAY 2014

RESEARCH QUESTION: ***How do university lecturers supervise doctoral students in diverse contexts in South African universities?***

Biographical/background information

1. ***Enrolment to PhD:*** *Perhaps we may begin by you telling me about where you graduated what prompted you to enrol for a PhD.*

Probing questions

- What about other factors- people around you, place of work etc.?
- Kindly please describe your supervision experiences at masters' level.

2. *To what extent would you say you were prepared to undertake studies at doctoral level?*

Probing questions

- What were the main requirements for admission into the PhD programme?
- Prior to your enrolment, what were your expectations of a PhD experience/learning?
- Would you advise a friend today to enrol for PhD? Why?

3. ***Approaches to supervision/Mediation strategies:*** *Describe for me your interaction with your supervisor for the past one year.*

Probing questions

- Where was this and how is (was) it organized? Frequency?
- Besides, what other kind of support were you exposed to?
- How then have you could engage in serious academic writing?
- Tell me how your supervisor has been instrumental on this issue.
- How does your supervisor get to know that you are happy or not happy with what you are doing?
- What have you found different from the way you were supervised at masters' level?
- In your view, how should the whole process of supervision be approached?

4. ***Other responsibilities****: How accessible has been your supervisor?*

Probing questions

- Why do you think she/he does all these?
- How does this affect you?
- What do you think should be done?

5. ***Departmental context:*** *What happens at the departments that enhances your studies/supervision?*

Probing questions

- How do these things enhance your relationship and processes in the supervision triangle?
- How does it ensure that you are constantly attended to by the supervisor and you graduate on time?

6. *To what extent does your topic fall within one discipline?*

Probing questions

- Has it remained the way it was? (i.e. work to remain your authentic voice)
- Why did it take that course?
- How has your supervisor managed to navigate across the varied disciplines to bring you this far?

7. ***Levels of exposure:*** *Have you attended conferences both locally and internationally?*

Probing questions

- Why did you attend these conferences?
- How does that relate to your supervisor and supervision experiences?
- Explain the view that both PhD students and supervisors in S. Africa are not well exposed internationally.
- Share with me your experience being supervised by people from different social and racial backgrounds.
- How do you meet your financial obligations as a PhD student in South Africa?

8. ***Diversity in skills:*** *What have you learnt from your supervisor so far?*

Probing questions

- What other things have you learnt because of being in the community of academics and peers?
- Would you have learnt all this without your supervisor?
- What else would you wish to have learnt while you were doing your PhD? Why?
- How do you rank yourself on the labour market with this PhD?

9. ***PhD Production rate:*** *What have you picked as the main challenges or constraints of PhD supervision?*

Probing questions

- Having said that, how do you think they can they be addressed?
- Why do you think South Africa produces fewer PhDs per year comparatively?

10. ***PhD Committee:*** *Comment on the PhD committee and what you think about it as a mediation strategy for supervision.*

Probing questions

- How would you describe the place of a supervisor on this committee?
- Do you get support from individual committee members out of the sessions?
- What are your honest views about this committee? Has it succeeded?
- How can it be improved?

11. **The nature of the PhD:** *How would you describe a PhD in the world today?*

APPENDIX 4

UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

ETHICS CLEARANCE

Dear B Akala

Ethical Clearance Number: 2013-062

Re: Pedagogies of Doctoral Supervision in South African universities

Ethical clearance for this study is granted subject to the following conditions:

- If there are major revisions to the research proposal based on recommendations from the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
- If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, it remains the duty of the student to submit a new application.
- It remains the student's responsibility to ensure that all ethical forms and documents related to the research are kept in a safe and secure facility and are available on demand.
- Please quote the reference number above in all future communications and documents.

The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee has decided to

☒ Grant ethical clearance for the proposed research.
☐ Provisionally grant ethical clearance for the proposed research
☐ Recommend revision and resubmission of the ethical clearance documents

Sincerely,

Prof Geoffrey Lautenbach
Chair: FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
8 October 2013